



# The REDHEAD



## Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery

Winter 2017

A Special Committee of the Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis

Vol. 11 No. 1

### RHWO NEWS

#### Planned Summer Research

The Red-headed woodpecker Recovery's (RhWR) plans for our summer research has been formulated with some details still to be worked out. We will be working with Assistant Professor Henry Streby at the University of Toledo (Ohio), Post Doctoral Fellow Elena West (PhD pending from University of Wisconsin - Madison), a to-be-hired by the RhWR - Ornithology Research Technician, research interns from Cedar Creek Ecosystem Science Reserve (CCESR) and our RhWR volunteers.

Professor Streby has published over 35 peer reviewed research articles and given many national and international presentations at professional conferences. He has published many articles on golden-winged warblers and oven-birds. Professor Streby will be studying red-headed woodpeckers in Ohio and will be working with soon-to-be Dr. West and the RhWR in Minnesota at CCESR. We are also investigating studying other populations in Minnesota and Wisconsin.

The RhWR volunteers and the Ornithology Research Technician (ORTech) will continue the work begun in 2008 and continued through 2016 by Ari Waldstein and Brittney Yohannes with the help of RhWR volunteers and interns from CCESR. This will involve identifying a minimum of 30 nest trees, followed by monitoring egg laying, hatching

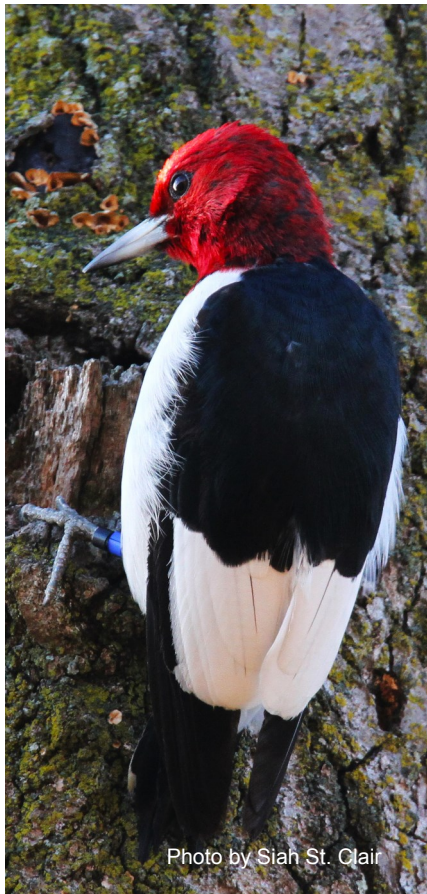


Photo by Siah St. Clair

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### A Note from the Chair

#### Notes from the chair

Winter 2017

Seems like all these 'notes' begin with a comment on how strange the weather has been. As Yogi Berra would say, "It's De'ja'vu all over again." While our activities usually slow down in the winter months, this year our research team has been working full bore to secure grant monies for the coming spring. We are excited about the possibility of having a post-doctoral coordinator for our efforts to explore more fully RHWO breeding habits and over-wintering grounds. Thanks especially to Keith Olstad who heads up the cracker-jack team of Siah St. Clair, Jim Howitz, Jerry Bahls and Gene Merriam.

In addition to research, we will be continuing our advocacy work with Sherburne NWR, Nerstrand Big Woods, the Belwin Conservancy, and hopefully we will be able to do a survey at the Camp Ripley National Guard Training Grounds. Four years ago we visited Camp Ripley and found evidence of successful nesting, but within the bounds of two large firing ranges (with unexploded armaments). We had to confine our search to the perimeter of the two ranges. We are confident that there are a number of nesting RHWO at Camp Ripley. Stay tuned.

Finally, we are most excited about an upcoming article on our project in the national magazine *BirdWatching*. Available on news stands in March.

Chet Meyers, Chair

#### *Did you Know?*

Red-headed Woodpecker is on the 2014 State of the **Birds** Watch List, which lists **bird species** that are at risk of becoming threatened or endangered without conservation action. The species is also listed as Near Threatened on the IUCN Red List.

The red-headed woodpecker is endangered in Connecticut and is considered one of the rarest breeding birds in the state. A decline in farming and the associated loss of open woodlots through forest succession have reduced the amount of suitable habitat needed by these woodpeckers. As with other woodpecker species, competition with starlings for nest cavities has also contributed to their decline.

# Note From the Editor

Research, *Continued from page 1*

and fledging of young by using our nest camera. This will begin in mid-May and carry through August or until the last nest has fledged.

Soon after the Red-headed woodpeckers (RHWO) return about mid-May, volunteers, the ORTech and our banders will begin capturing and banding them. This will probably continue until all of the nesting pairs are banded. This year we will begin collecting blood samples from the RHWOs for future DNA studies. This year there will also be a concerted effort to band juvenile birds and collect blood samples from them. Learning the best way to capture them will be a difficult task. Current thought is to modify the nest sites by cutting a door into it before the birds arrive back and then be able to open the nest and catch the juveniles before they fledge.

Doctoral candidate Elena West will begin a study at CCESR to determine where the RHWO's migrate to when they leave CCESR. Elena's experience studying Stellar's jay as part of her Doctoral studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison provides the necessary experience needed to conduct our research. She has published seven peer reviewed papers and given seven presentations at national conferences. Because of the complex nature of this research it is anticipated this effort will be a pilot effort in 2017 with the bulk of the research done in 2018 and beyond. The research will involve use of geolocators and/or radio transmitters. This will give the location where the birds are in the country and how long they are there. In order to use these devices our research team will require permission from the USGS Bird Banding Lab. Some members of the team will require special training in handling birds and how to attach the devices safely.

Depending upon which device is used, RHWOs that are mounted with geolocation devices, a less expensive option, will be required to be recaptured to retrieve the data. This will require a team to do this again in the spring of 2018. At which time the raw data will be retrieved from the device. This raw data then will need to be processed to give the locations where the bird travelled. Thus getting good data about where the birds spend their winters will depend on them actually migrating, which they don't always do, surviving the trip and actually recapturing them again. That is why radio transmitting devices, a more expensive option, may also be employed minimizing the risk of getting no data since the birds

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Our plans for this coming summer are very ambitious, but we expect to accomplish them. We believe we have secured the funding to be able to meet our commitments. However next year may be a challenge. I'm not asking you for money, I'm asking for organizations that may give us grants we can use to fund our research. Your employer, your bank, your rich uncle - these are all potential resources. If you have the contact information that would great, but we can usually find out who to contact. Your personal acquaintance with the contact person is the best. We would like to again hire a Ornithological Research Technician and retain Elena West for another summer. We hope you can send us a few organizations to contact. Send them to Chet or me (see our contact info below).

I have received a few red-headed woodpecker enthusiasts stories about them, but I would like many more. Your stories are greatly appreciated by our readers and serve a very great service for the Editor. They help fill the space in the newsletter and thus your Editor doesn't have to work so hard to get it out. Pictures are great! Send the original picture file, because it prints the best and I can crop to fit.

To repeat from the last issue, after many years of being the Editor, I would like to hand it off to someone else who wants to take on the task. My desire is to do more field work and to travel the state and country looking for redheads. 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 printing and 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

## RhWR Contact Information

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## 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.

## Reuse of Nest Cavities by Red-headed Woodpeckers

We have been puzzled by the apparent lack of nest hygiene in the Red-headed Woodpeckers we have been observing at the Cedar Creek Ecosystem Science Reserve. None of us has ever seen adults eat or carry away fecal sacs. According to the literature, woodpecker nestlings produce fecal sacs which are eaten by the adults for the first few days after the eggs hatch. Then the adults carry the sacs away for a few days. The nestlings eventually climb up from the bottom of the nest cavity and cling to the sides of the cavity for the last couple weeks in the nest and wastes accumulate in the bottom until the young fledge.

Woodpeckers generally do not reuse nest cavities. This makes sense if the bottom of nest cavities contains compost that could harbor parasites and other disease agents or produce an odor that could attract predators. However, 41% of our Red-headed Woodpeckers nest in a cavity we know was previous used by Red-headed Woodpeckers. Reuse of a nest cavity should save time and energy, but the nestlings might be at increased risk of predation or disease.

If the birds are going to renest in a cavity, it makes sense that they would keep the nest as clean as possible. This would be particularly true in birds that attempted a second nest within a season in the same cavity as the first. We know that 21 pairs of our RHWOs attempted a second brood and 18 of these attempts were in the same cavity as the first brood.

I looked at nest success of birds that nested in a cavity used by RHWOs in a previous year and birds nesting in a cavity that had never been used before and may have been newly excavated by the birds. Of birds reusing a nest cavity, 81% fledged at least one young. Of birds using a new nest cavity, 77% fledged at least one young. Birds reusing a nest cavity fledged on average 1.7 young and birds using a new nest cavity fledged on average 1.4 young. These differences were not statistically significantly different. So, cavity reuse did not reduce fledging success.

After reusing a nest cavity, 70% of birds survived to the next breeding season. After using a new nesting cavity, 68% of birds survived to the next breeding season. So, whether a bird used a pre-existing nest cavity or excavated a new cavity had no effect on its survival. Hence, we have found no evidence that cavity reuse had any effect on the survival or reproduction of Red-headed Woodpeckers.

We have only limited observations on nest sanitation. We found a nasty pile of waste about 4 inches deep in one nest cavity we examined. On the other hand, we have looked at nest trees that blew down while the nest was still active and the bottom of the cavity appeared to be nice and clean. In 2016 Siah St. Clair photographed an adult hauling away wood chips mixed with black waste material from a nest. I saw an adult do likewise at another nest.

We hope to make further observations of how the birds deal with nest waste accumulation this spring and summer.

- Jim Howitz

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Migration, *Continued from page 2*

are monitored every few minutes or whatever time frame desired. A decision as to which device and how many of each is mounted on RHWOs has not been made and may depend upon our permit and on how many are captured for device mounting.

Since we know that not every year the RHWOs migrate, a study looking at food supply, usually the prime factor affecting RHWO migration, will be conducted under the supervision of Elena with the help of CCECSR interns, volunteers and the ORTech. This team will collect data of which insects are eaten, which mast is eaten and when during the summer it is eaten. A study of abundance of each will be undertaken to determine if there is a correlation with the abundance of a food and if they migrate. Also if birds store food does this signal overwintering?

The CCECSR interns, volunteers and the ORTech will also install and monitor nest and trail cameras to look for nest predators such as bears, raccoon, mink, snakes and possibly other birds. This will be start during egg laying through fledging. Other activity like egg removal and dead young removal by adults will be watched for.

- Jerry Bahls

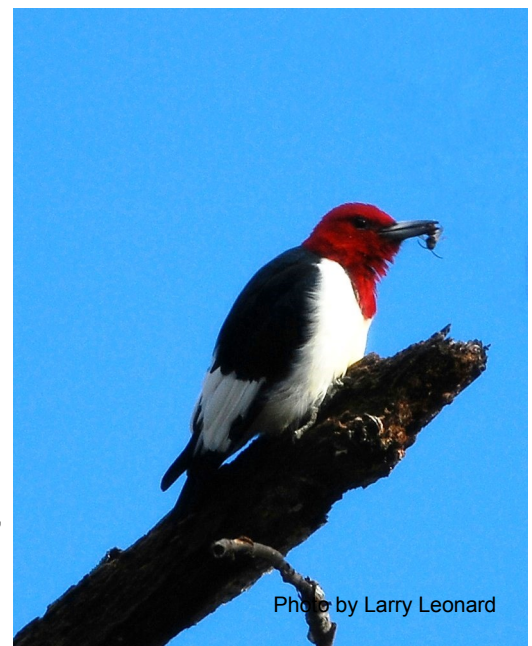


Photo by Larry Leonard

## Redheads at Crane Meadows NWR

Dick Schoenberger recently brought to the Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery's attention that they are at Crane Meadows NWR. This link will take you to a website that will acquaint you with Crane Meadows NWR - <http://friendsofcranemeadows.com/>.- The Refuge is not quite as far north as, and a little east of, Little Falls, MN.

The woodpeckers are located along a trail in the northwest corner of the Refuge.

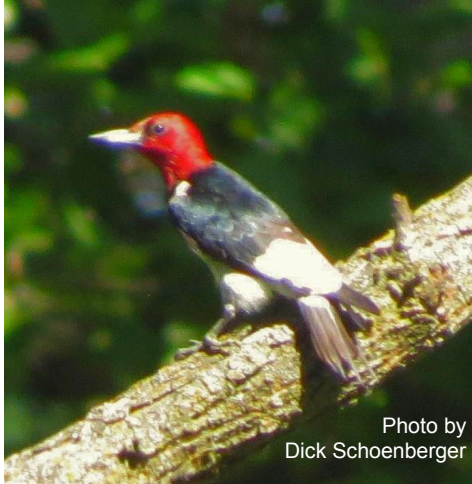


Photo by  
Dick Schoenberger

## Spring Issue Topics?

Send your observations and references to Jerry Bahls (rhwracm@comcast.net) by April 15th. Also send any photos or information 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 meeting will be February 15, 2017. All are welcome and encouraged 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  
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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