



Siah St. Clair

The REDHEAD



Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery

Winter 2019

A Special Committee of the Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis

Vol. 13 No. 1

RHWO NEWS

A Note from the Chair

Megan Massa ABA Bird of the Year Artist

Megan Massa, one of our Ornithology Research Technicians this past summer, was chosen as the American Bird Association (ABA) "Bird of the Year" artist. She painted the Red-billed Tropicbird which is the ABA's logo bird to help celebrate the ABA's 50th Anniversary. The Red-billed Tropicbird was designated the "2019 Bird of the Year" by the ABA especially for the anniversary. Megan's drawing will be featured on the cover of the February 2019 issue of *Birding* magazine. Her creation, a Red-billed Tropicbird soaring over a boat full of birders, shows a unique perspective of the bird. This is the first Bird of the Year work to exist completely in a digital realm, a fascinating process that allowed Megan to add some cool artistic easter eggs. She also admitted on a ABA Podcast that some of the birders on the boat are people she knows. Because the digital process allows the artist to zoom in to draw the picture in detail, she was able to create these special images in the drawing.

Continued on page 2, Artist



Winter 2019

As I write this it is 27 degrees below zero outside, the coldest portion of the Minnesota winter. I hope the Cedar Creek Red Headed Woodpeckers (about 20) that did not migrate have plenty of acorns hidden to give them the energy to stay warm. And that those that did migrate are preparing to return. That is their job. The RhWR team is busy doing their many tasks to prepare for the upcoming research and education season.

We have received many applications for our summer research technician positions and will be interviewing very soon. The fund raising process to help pay for the research staff, materials, and other activities is moving forward rapidly right now. We have just had a membership meeting on January 16th with very good attendance. At that meeting we heard about what we have learned about RHWOs in the first 10 years of our effort, and what we will be learning in the near future.

Dr. Elena West, the lead researcher for this project here, is very busy compiling data from last year, and getting the many details finalized to prepare for the 2019 field season. The objective to create a field researched Best Management Practices document that will be the first such report on Red Headed Woodpeckers and the habitat they live in. A solid process intended to reverse the decline of RHWOs. We are making a difference.

I have just returned from a trip where I gave a presentation to an Audubon Chapter in Florida about our research on Red Headed Woodpeckers. A group of their members volunteer on a similar research project for the federally endangered Red-cockaded Woodpeckers. Volunteers everywhere are making a big difference.

Siah St. Clair
Steering Committee Chair

RhWR Fund Raiser

The Redheaded Woodpecker Recovery now has a fund raiser to help us get the money we need to continue our research efforts. His name is **Jim Stengel** and he can be contacted by phone at **612 721-9083** or by email at **slheidiss@yahoo.com**. If you know of an organization or individual that will donate money for research, please contact him.

Note From the Editor

On the back page of this newsletter is a list of volunteer opportunities with the Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery. Please review them and consider volunteering for any of them. We can never have too many!!

Our fund raising period is upon us and we've applied for many grants that we hope will be successful. None more so than the Legislative - Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR) grant request (proposal 034-AH). We have received a high grade for the proposal, because we have a very high volunteer component. But the Legislature must approve and the Governor must sign the legislation. We anticipate they will, but it is not certain. If it appears that our proposal is getting some opposition, we will ask you to contact your state legislators and urge them to vote for the recommended projects.

Hope to see you on April 13th at the CCSR Training Day.

Jerry Bahls, Editor

Artist, *Continued from page 1*

Megan joins a very prestigious list of ABA Bird of the Year artists, such as David Sibley, Julie Zickefoose, and Louise Zemaits.

Megan's drawing on the previous page depicts Mo (short for "mohawk") and its parents, Margot (below Mo, note color bands) and Paul. Mo was one of the last fledglings for the year. The parents were Megan's favorite pair to observe this past summer.



Photo by Siah St. Clair

Membership Dues

Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery (RhWR) receives almost all its operating revenues from membership dues.

- 1) Basic memberships are \$20.00/calendar year.
- 2) Members who contribute more will receive other benefits along with the newsletter. Those contributing \$50.00 will also receive a handsome embroidered patch.
- 3) The newsletter will be published for members.

Send your membership applications and renewals to -

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

Thank you for your continued support.

A Winter's Roost

We are three friends, our boots crunching through old snow under partly cloudy skies one late afternoon in February. We have come to this savanna to look for overwintering red-headed woodpeckers. On one knoll, two adults flash into view among bare oak branches, soon followed by three more on a nearby slope, their resplendent red heads popping from winter's backdrop of black and white. Along the fringe of a frozen marsh, a pair of juveniles appear, their heads showing only hints of reddish mottling. On this mild day of fitful light breeze and temperatures in the 20's, all are active. They flutter frequently from tree to tree, conversing quietly from each perch. The chickadees, crows, and bluejays announce themselves far more raucously. One juvenile redhead ducks into a cavity and, within seconds, flies back out.

Then the sun begins to set. Without sounding an alert, the world suddenly goes still. In the hush, even the breeze fades to stillness. We also stand still. Heartbeats slow. Dusk slides over the sky from east to west. The sun disappears for the night. More minute pass.

Then, almost simultaneously, come four brief croaky calls from four snags, and four red-headed woodpeckers quickly slip silently into four cavities for the night.

Sleep tight, birds.

- Anonymous

RhWR Contact Information

Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis

President Keith Olstad klbolstad2@gmail.com 612 940-1534
Website www.AudubonChapterofMinneapolis.org

Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery

Interim Chair Siah St. Clair stclairs@comcast.net 763 234-6146
Treasurer Jerry Bahls rhwacm@comcast.net 763 572-2333
Recorder <open>
Editor Jerry Bahls rhwacm@comcast.net 763 572-2333
Website www.RedheadRecovery.org
Research Blog Website www.rhworesearch.org

What We've Learned

Red-headed Woodpecker Research and Recovery Summary

From May 2008 thru January 2019

Background

Red-headed woodpecker (RHWO) populations have declined by an estimated 95% since 1970 in Minnesota. The Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery (RhWR) is a program of the Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis (ACM). Since 2008, RhWR citizen scientists have monitored and conducted research at the Cedar Creek Ecosystem Science Reserve (CCESR) to learn more about RHWO habitat preferences and breeding behavior. Two graduate students from the University of Minnesota (UM) worked with the RhWR and completed master's theses in 2012 and 2017 (see below). In 2017, we began large-scale research collaboration with academic partners at the University of Minnesota and the University of Toledo-Ohio to address key information gaps about RHWO ecology, with a particular emphasis on identifying the aspects of oak savanna habitat that support nest success, population growth, and migration patterns.

Why Cedar Creek?

The largest known "cluster" of RHWOs in Minnesota (and potentially the region) is located at CCESR, with approximately 60–120 individuals per year and 30–60 nesting pairs per year for at least the past 10 years in one 300 acre area. The population of RHWOs at CCESR has apparently stayed fairly constant over the past 10 years. What follows are some of the highlights of what we have learned and are in the process of learning about this species, which will inform efforts to restore and conserve oak savanna throughout Minnesota and the Midwest region.

Key Findings from recent research (as noted above) at Cedar Creek

Ariane Waldstein, MS Thesis, 2012

- RHWOs at CCESR preferred nesting habitat with low densities of small snags and high densities of trees with dead limbs that were less than 10 meters above the ground.
 - * Small snag density was defined as the number of snags less than 12 cm in diameter inside a 30-meter circle surrounding each nest
- RHWOs at CCESR preferred large dead nest trees; nest density was also highest in areas burned 20–25 times since 1964 (burn units at CCESR were burned 0–36 times between 1964 and 2012 when this study was conducted).

Brittney Yohannes, MS Thesis, 2017

- Most nests (46 of 61; 75%) were found in dead trees.
- Daily nest survival rate was higher for nests initiated earlier in the season (generally in the month of May).
 - * Daily nest survival rate is the chance a nest will survive a given day as measured over a 45-day nesting period in this study.
 - * Overall daily nest survival rate was 78% across the 45-day nesting period measured in this study.
- Individual woodpeckers whose nests failed were more likely to pair with a new mate the following breeding season.

Interesting new findings from current and past research at Cedar Creek

A few unique observations from the work we have been doing over several years as we work toward our larger goals:

- During the 2018 breeding season we recorded the first known observations of polyandry (female reproducing with more than one male) in RHWOs. We documented two females each paired with two different males at two different nests.
- During the summer field season in 2018 we also learned that great-horned owls (GHOW) are predators of juvenile RHWOs. We tracked the signals from two fledglings that had been radio-marked to GHOW pellets, where we found the fledgling remains and color bands.
- As a master's student, Brittney Yohannes recorded the first observation of a Bullsnake predating a RHWO nest.
- By observing color-banded birds over a number of years, we have determined that after migrating at least some RHWOs exhibit site fidelity (return to CCESR) and some return to the same nest cavity or nest tree in subsequent years.

- Dr. Elena West

While we cannot yet draw firm conclusions related to our current research goals, we look forward to sharing updates on our work and findings from our research over the coming months and years. Please visit www.rhworesearch.org for updates and information!

RhWR Volunteer Opportunities

The Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery (RhWR) has a need for many volunteers now and through the fall. Here is a list of them in the order of priority and a very brief description of the duties -

Communications Representative on Steering Committee -

Oversee website, newsletter and Facebook page and be communications advocate on Steering Committee

Newsletter Editor - Coordinate publication of newsletter

Webmaster - Manage the RhWR website

Lead Citizen Science Projects - Recruit and organize volunteers of RhWR citizen science projects

Do Citizen Science Projects (2019) - Monitor RhWR nest sites, Monitor roost sites, Monitor food eaten, Monitor mast (Please note this requires CCESR training.)

Email rhwracm@comcast.net to sign up for any of these volunteer opportunities or to ask any questions.

Next RhWR Steering Committee Meeting

The RhWR Steering Committee usually meets on the 3rd Wednesday the month at 7:00 pm. The next meeting will be on March 20, 2019 at the Brookdale Library at 6125 Shingle Creek Pkwy in Brooklyn Center at 7:00 pm. All are welcome and encouraged to attend. Please encourage friends to attend also. For current information check our website at www.RedheadRecovery.org.

Important Dates

Research Team Meeting	February 13, 2019
Lake Home & Cabin Show	February 15 - 17, 2019
Great Backyard Bird Count	February 15 - 18, 2019
Steering Committee Meeting	March 20, 2019
RHWO Training at CCESR	April 13, 2019

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

Save that Snag!

Place
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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 \$20/year! Please send my membership information to the address at right.

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 at 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