



# The REDHEAD

## Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery



Summer 2024

Working to improve the future of Red-headed Woodpeckers

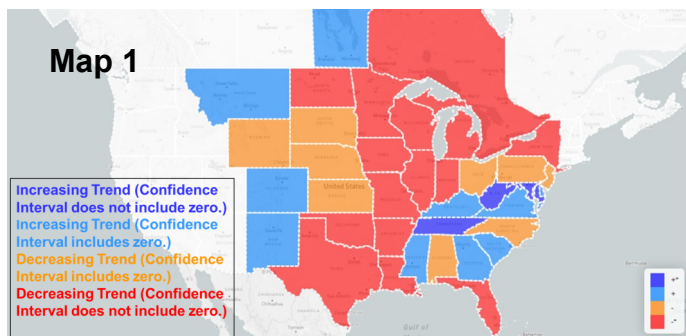
Vol. 18 No. 3

### RHWO NEWS

### A Note from the Chair

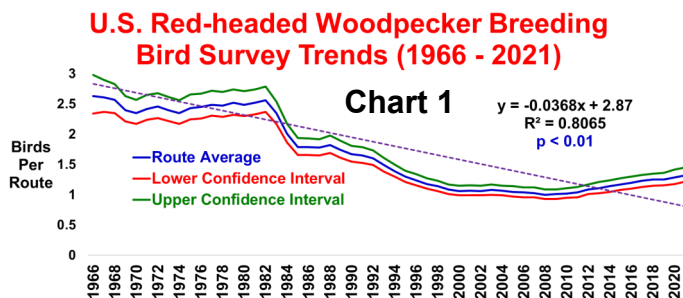
#### Red-headed Woodpeckers on Breeding Bird Surveys

Red-headed Woodpecker (RHWO) numbers, as reported on recent Christmas Bird Counts (CBC), appear to be stable or increasing. RHWO breeding numbers, as reported on Breeding Bird Surveys (BBS), show similar results. Map 1



#### Breeding Bird Survey Trends 1966 - 2021

shows RHWO BBS results from 1966 through 2021. RHWOs show decreasing trends in most of the western and northern parts of their range. Chart 1 shows the same data with RHWOs having a significant decrease nationwide.



From 1966 – 2021 Red-headed Woodpeckers have shown a significant decline nationally on Breeding Bird Surveys.

Map 2 (on the right) shows the same data, but only from 2000 through 2021. Here most states show an increasing trend. Chart 2 also shows the BBS data from 2000-2021, and RHWOs have a nationwide significantly increasing trend.

So, on their breeding grounds, RHWOs decreased significantly from 1966 through 2000, but in the current century they have increased significantly, though not to their levels in the early years of the BBS.

Continued on page 2, Century

#### Summer 2024

Exciting changes are happening with the Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery. After 18 years as a special project of the Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis, the Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery has incorporated as a separate non-profit organization in the last two months. We thank ACM for all the good years while we worked as partners for the recovery of Red-headed Woodpeckers and wish them well in their new endeavors.

We have completed the application for 501(c)(3) tax exempt status from the IRS and have recently received the approval. Everyone will be contacted about our new mailing address and email address [Editor note: In Contact Info below].

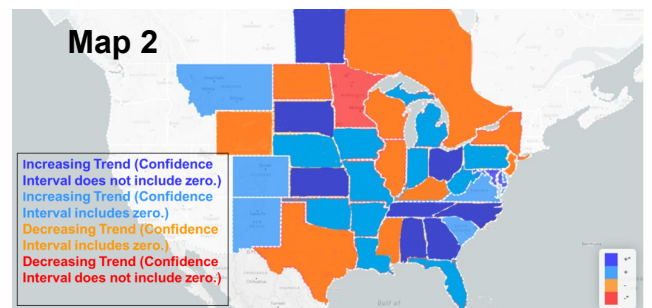
This new status as our own organization allows us to have control over the funds we raise and to raise funds on our own. We will also have our own website with access for viewers to extensive information about Red-headed Woodpeckers, including research activities past and current, pictures and descriptions of their life history, the habitat they need, activities of the RhWR Project, and much more.

Meanwhile our volunteers are also conducting weekly Red-headed Woodpecker nest surveys at Cedar Creek ESR. At this time it looks like this year will set a record for the number of Red-headed Woodpecker nests discovered and the number of nestlings that fledge from those nests. Many of the pairs are working on their second nests of the summer as I write this.

Thank you all for your continued support. We are looking forward to new opportunities to improve habitat and population numbers for Red-headed Woodpeckers.

Siah St. Clair, Steering Committee Chair

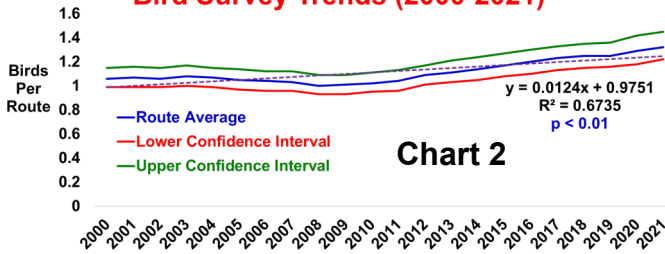
#### Breeding Bird Survey Trends 2000 - 2021



RHWO populations presumably have always shown considerable ups and downs. Natural events such as fires,

## Note From the Editor

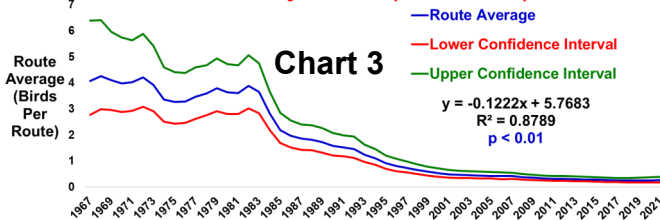
### U.S. Red-headed Woodpecker Breeding Bird Survey Trends (2000-2021)



floods, insect infestations, and fungal diseases that kill or damage trees create RHWO habitat and may be accompanied by RHWO populations increases. Human removal of dead limbs and trees may degrade RHWO habitat and result in population decreases. Dutch elm disease killed millions of trees and contributed to RHWO increases in the 50s and 60s. Oak wilt may be having a similar effect now.

Chart 3 shows that in Minnesota, few if any RHWOs are

### Minnesota Red-headed Woodpecker Breeding Bird Survey Trends (1967 - 2021)



From 1967 – 2021 Red-headed Woodpeckers have shown a significant decrease on Minnesota Breeding Bird Surveys. Minnesota Breeding Bird Surveys no longer include areas where Red-headed Woodpeckers are common.

found on BBS routes, and far fewer than 50 years ago. Note that on Map 2, Minnesota is the only state in red, indicating a significant decrease in RHWO numbers. This may indicate that few RHWOs breed in Minnesota. It certainly indicates that BBS routes in Minnesota do not detect the notable RHWO breeding populations we know exist at Cedar Creek and Camp Ripley.

Map 3 shows the average breeding density of RHWOs as detected by Breeding Bird Surveys from 2011 – 2015.

Continued in next column

As Siah has said there are big changes coming to the Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery. The RhWR very recently received a letter from the IRS informing us that our application for 501(c)(3) tax exempt status has been approved. So you can make a tax deductible donation to the RhWR. Since becoming our own nonprofit corporation, we are no longer affiliated with the Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis. We thank the ACM for their many years of helping RHWOs move closer to previous populations. So clip out the donation coupon on the back page and send your donation today.

As part of our separating from the ACM, we are in the process of building our own website. It will have a new URL which is also listed below. We will be exploring using a shorter URL to make it easier to type on your electronic devices. We anticipate it will be available within a couple of weeks. However it will be changing often in the next year. So visit it often!

Jerry Bahls, Editor

Continued from previous column

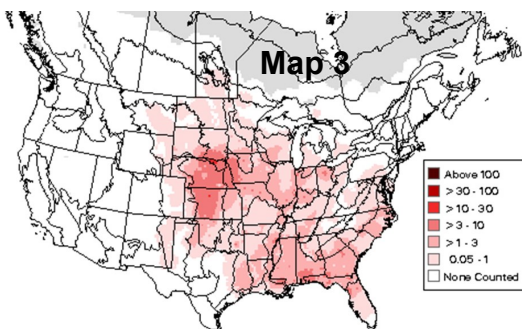
The greatest breeding density appears to be in Nebraska, Kansas, and smaller adjacent areas of Iowa and South Dakota. Most of the Midwest and South also support reasonable breeding numbers. RHWO breeding density north of 90 in Minnesota and elsewhere is low.

I am surprised that the BBS in Nebraska and western Kansas are so high because the CBC in these areas generally report few if any RHWOs. Comparing BBS and CBC numbers of RHWOs supports the general consensus that RHWOs that breed in the west commonly migrate east in the fall, and birds that breed in the north migrate south, presumably seeking an area with mast that they store in the fall and consume in the winter. There may also be a movement north in the fall from the Gulf Coast, since more RHWOs appear there in the breeding season than in the winter.

In conclusion, RHWO breeding populations appear to be stable or increasing throughout most of their range. RHWOs at the northern limits of their breeding range, such as Minnesota, may still be down substantially from their peaks forty or fifty years ago.

Jim Howitz

### Red-headed Woodpecker Breeding Bird Survey Trends 2011 - 2015



## RhWR Contact Information

### Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery

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PO Box 32172  
Minneapolis, MN 55432-9998

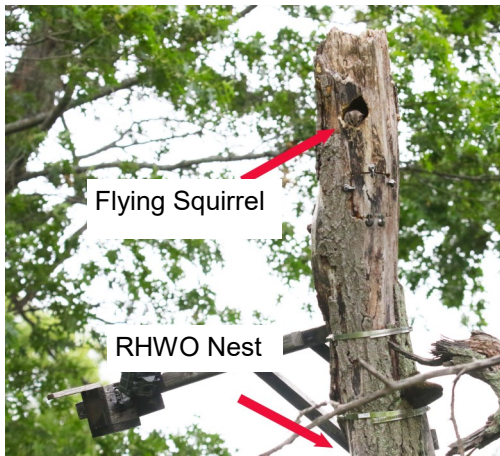
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# Red-headed Woodpeckers and Close-Neighbor Relations

Siah St. Clair

Recently, as I was climbing a ladder to change the batteries on a Red-headed Woodpecker (RHW) nest camera at Cedar Creek Ecosystem Science Reserve (CCESR), I looked up and could see 3 furry heads with very large curious eyes



looking down at me from the nest cavity the RHWOs had used the previous year. It was about 3 feet above the nest cavity the RHWOs are using this year. A Southern Flying Squirrel family had moved in and was living in the cavity a few feet from the active RHWO nest.



This was not the first time I had found another animal living in a vacated RHWO cavity in the same tree and time as a RHW pair were nesting in a newer cavity. In May of 2019 I was cutting a porthole into a new RHWO nest cavity that had 3 eggs in it (portholes are created for researchers to reach in and place transmitters on the nestlings). While working I could hear baby birds begging very close by. I looked around the tree and there was a cavity that the RHWO family had used the previous year. I opened the porthole for that cavity and found 5 baby Northern Flickers (NOFL) and an unhatched egg. The two nest cavities were less than 3 feet from each other, but on opposite sides of the tree.



Flicker nestlings

During a different year (2020) I photographed a tree at CCESR that had an active RHWO nest as well as a European Starling nest and a Gray Squirrel nest all at the same time. And another year (2023) I was at another tree where a RHWO and a Pileated Woodpecker were both nesting in the tree at the same time. While all these animals normally nest a few yards away from each other in different trees it did seem amazing to observe them nesting so close together in the same tree.



Scarcity of both good nest cavities and cavity trees is certainly a factor that brings these different species into close proximity and possibly makes them more tolerant when selecting nest sites. RHWOs will often excavate new cavities in the same tree that they used in previous years, creating opportunities for other species to use old vacant cavities in the same tree at the same time. Old RHWO cavities are also frequently enlarged for access by larger animals like Gray Squirrels, making them accessible to additional animals.



These different animals usually fill different feeding niches within the Oak Savanna habitat during the nesting season, so they would not normally perceive each other as competitors other than for the nest cavities. This may be a factor that allows them to simultaneously nest in the same tree. Northern Flickers get much of their food from the ground, eating ants and other small insects, and they never fly-catch for insects as RHWOs regularly do. Southern Flying Squirrels are nocturnal and do not have an insect/invertebrate focused diet when nesting as do the woodpeckers. But they will steal bird eggs and the RHWOs have to guard their nests at night to prevent losing their eggs or nestlings to a flying squirrel, but that is true whether the flying squirrel is nesting in the same tree or not.

Continued on page 4, Woodpeckers

Gray Squirrels eat mostly fruit, tree buds, berries, and fungi during the summer season, but will eat bird eggs and nestlings, if they can get at them. European Starlings eat some of the same insects as RhWROs but find their insects using different hunting techniques than the woodpeckers. Pileated Woodpeckers eat ant and beetle larvae found mostly inside dead and dying trees.

As species that are commonly found in the savanna habitat, all these animals regularly nest and search for food in trees often close to Red-headed Woodpecker nest trees. It seems that it is mostly chance and cavity scarcity that at times they end up with nests close to each other in the same tree.

During the nesting season Red-headed Woodpeckers seem oblivious to these very close neighbors. But during other times of the year they are less tolerant and may have conflict with some of these animals over space and cached food. For Red-headed Woodpeckers having very close neighbors may only be tolerated during certain times of the year, like during the nesting season.

### Next RhWR Steering Committee

The RhWR Steering Committee usually meets on the 3rd Wednesday of the month at 7:00 pm every 2 months. The next *virtual* meeting will be on September 18, 2024 at 7:00 pm. If you would like to participate, please contact Siah St. Clair. All are welcome and encouraged to attend.

### Important Dates

Steering Committee Sep 18, 2024

ALL meetings are *virtual* until further notice.

Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery  
PO Box 32172  
Minneapolis MN 55432-9998

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## Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery 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 (\$50 is suggested rate)! Please send my membership information to the address at right.

*I'd like to renew!* Renew my RhWR membership for \$20/year (\$50 is suggested rate).

*I'd like to donate to the RhWR as part of my IRS Retirement Distribution.* Please contact us if unsure how to make the donation. We can help make it happen.

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

E-MAIL \_\_\_\_\_

**Send this application and make check payable to:**

Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery  
PO Box 32172  
Minneapolis, MN 55432-9998

Memo line: Redhead Woodpecker Recovery or RhWR