



# The REDHEAD

## Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery



Spring 2021

A Special Committee of the Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis

Vol. 15 No. 2

### RHWO NEWS

#### Potential RHWO Nest Cavity Use by Other Bird Species in Spring 2021

On April 22, 2021, three RHWO nest cameras that had been left out through the winter at Cedar Creek ESR had their memory cards replaced and batteries checked to prepare for the returning RHWOs this spring. When looking at the memory cards that were removed it became obvious that a few bird pairs were considering or definitely preparing to use an old RHWO nest cavity for their own nests this spring. Returning RHWO pairs may dispute cavity ownership, and may or may not win back their cavity if they choose to fight for it.

Nesting pair interests documented by the RHWO nest cameras this spring include:

- A Pileated Woodpecker pair took an interest in the cavity at nest tree 84. The camera captured them 12 separate times at the nest since November 3, and as a pair present together at least 3 times. On March 22 they “talked” softly together while checking out the nest. Unfortunately, a wind storm blew the huge dead nest tree 84 down on March 24. So ended the exciting possibility of recording a Pileated Woodpecker pair nesting from beginning to completion in a former RHWO nest cavity.
- On March 18<sup>th</sup>, a pair of Bluebirds were captured by the camera at nest 223. Both the male and female were going in and out of the cavity calling to each other. The camera recorded 61 events with this pair of Bluebirds removing old nest material from inside the cavity, talking and calling to each other, both going in and out of the cavity. Unfortunately, a pair of European Starlings also discovered the nest, and the Bluebirds finally stopped showing up on April 3.
- On March 18<sup>th</sup> a pair of European Starlings also found



*Continued in column 2, Starling*

### A Note from the Chair

Spring 2021

I hope this finds everyone well as vaccinations continue and social isolation is starting to diminish a bit. As spring advances and migrating birds arrive the Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery Project is making plans and starting activities for the 2021 season as well. As I write this the RHWOs that migrated have not yet arrived at Cedar Creek but the research team has been in the field preparing for their return, and working on related field data gathering tasks. A very recent RhWR Zoom information meeting was attended by over 40 individuals.

As Covid safety restrictions are eased slightly, plans are being made to conduct some surveys this summer at a few habitat partner sites. Thank you to the University of Minnesota for approving the continuation of RHWO research at Cedar Creek ESR this season. However, Covid safety restrictions remain in place there at this time. If there are changes we will let people know. One on-site outdoor program has been scheduled with an out-state group, and others may be requested as groups start to have in-person meetings again.

Watch for a notice that the Zooniverse RHWO Cavity Cam project has become live in the next week or so with opportunities for all of us to sort through 100,000 videos from the nest cameras we had on RHWO nests at Cedar Creek in 2020.

Siah St. Clair, Steering Committee Chair

*Starling Continued from column 1*

the nest cavity at nest 223. The camera captured 83 events with Starlings at the cavity between March 18 and April 20. The camera captured a fight with an intruding 3<sup>rd</sup> Starling, Starlings removing mouthfuls of nest debris 29 times, and many interactions between the pair. There appears to be a good chance that this pair may nest at this site unless driven away by an aggressive pair of returning RHWOs.



As ecosystem engineers, Red Headed Woodpeckers create cavities that other species use or adapt for nests, roosts, and other purposes. RHWOs are important for the survival and reproductive success of other species within their ecosystem.

Siah St. Clair

## Note From the Editor

Ending (Continued from page 3)

While the volunteer opportunities at Cedar Creek are still on hold the Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery still has other opportunities, listed on the back page, to help us with the operation of our organization. The first three are done electronically. One of these volunteer opportunities listed is Webmaster. This asks the volunteer to Manage the RhWR website. This involves keeping in communication with the Steering Committee and the two operating committees - Research Committee and the Education and Habitat Committee. The primary function will be to review committee notes to add pertinent information to the website. Also obsolete or erroneous information is to be removed and/or corrected.

Doing this task should get easier after the site is upgraded and moved to a new website host. This task will begin soon and should be completed in mid-July. If you have any suggestions for improving the site please use the "Contact Us" feature to send a message. We will try to implement your suggestion as soon as we can.

As you know the organization will be taking a somewhat different approach in the next couple of years, while we promote the Best Management Practices (BMP's) that will be written this fall. More emphasis will be given to communicating these BMP's to public and private land owners. You as a volunteer will have a big role in this endeavor. As soon as these tasks are identified we will communicate them to you via our website and Facebook page as well as this newsletter.

Please continue to send us your sightings, especially if they are nesting. Report all of them on eBird. This gives us an established database to use to analyse the data collected. And the data comes from all over the country.

I want to apologize again for the use of smaller fonts in some of the articles that appeared in last month's and this month's issues. It was done to be able to get the whole article in two issues.

I hope you enjoyed Jake's article. If you have something you would us to publish, send it to us.

Editor

through migration, find this tree and call on the top of it? Maybe both adults died the previous year and this snag is just extra appealing to RHWOs. Now that I was getting a second chance I went out and wrapped the snag that day! The male RHWO called for about 2 weeks in the tree and then one day he moved on. My assumption is that he was unable to find a female and drifted on not to be seen again that Summer. Then the next Spring I did notice RHWOs come through in migration and call for about a week but not go to the snag tree so I assumed that this was a migrant bird. And now, close to 3 to 4 years later I still have not had a bird move back in or try to over winter. I am still kicking myself to this day for not wrapping that tree with tin. Maybe I would have had a successful nest and had the birds return and start a new mini Cedar Creek in the oak woodlands that expand in all directions from my property. I know I won't let it happen to me again if I ever get the chance again in my lifetime. I also want to make sure that others in this group are aware of my story in the even they get birds to their properties. I also wanted to make a personal offer that I will wrap any nesting RHWO tree in Rice County. If outside the county I will do my best to wrap the tree myself or find someone else who can.

I think it is important to work closely with land managers and birders to try and find these isolated pockets of birds and try to give them some real on the ground protection in hopes of trying to get them back over the hump. People back in the day noticed the Eastern Bluebird was struggling, took action made a committee and now bluebirds have made a glorious comeback in the state. I have had as many as 3 nesting pairs of bluebirds at the same time on my 10 acre property. I think the time is NOW that we in the RHWO group get motived and try and help as many breeding pairs as we can.

As they say, you don't know what you have got until it is gone. My woods is not the same without the RHWOs. It's hard to put a word to it. Basically it is if the "Spark" and "Energy" is really missing. These birds are very vocal and in tune with the woods and the local birds surrounding them, from their alarm calls, to chasing squirrels away from their cache, to majestically flying from tree to tree in the open prairie in the Summer. I miss them very much. Who knows how the story will unfold for the RHWOs in Minnesota. Maybe they will continue to slowly dwindle out of existence. I am hoping to do everything I can to help keep that from happening as these birds sure left a mark on me.

Now that you have some background and know my RHWO story in my next article I would like to highlight the habitat improvements I made in detail and why I think I was able to attract that first overwintering male that started my story.

Cheers,

Jake Langeslag

## RhWR Contact Information

### Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis

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### Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery

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Research Blog Website [www.rhworesearch.org](http://www.rhworesearch.org)

## RhWR Fund Raiser

The Redheaded Woodpecker Recovery has a fund raiser to help us get the funds we need to continue our research efforts. **Jim Stengel** 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 Jim.

## Part II (Continued from *Winter 2021*)

# Trails and Tribulations of attracting first pair of nesting Red-headed woodpeckers in Rice County

Being a super bird geek I looked up nest monitoring cameras and found a model from a scientist in the southern part of the US that made them online with a cordless camera and a receiver that you could take images from (If other members in this group have birds and would like to borrow it – I am willing to loan it out to get data). I ordered one of these units online and got it as quick as I could. I checked the hole and the nest had 3 eggs and then I even caught the female on the nest in a picture incubating. My goal was to take pictures every few days to monitor the bird's progress. The birds did not seem too agitated by my presence and I made sure to try and look at the nest when I noticed both adult birds off feeding. After they hatched I started to check them more often to make sure they were still active. Out of the 3 eggs, only 2 hatched and the 2 young birds grew quickly.

It was now June I think and I went for a trip up north fishing. I wanted to keep my regular pictures going so I trained in another close friend of mine who was a bird watcher on how to properly take pictures while I was gone. When I came home he mentioned he couldn't figure out the technology and was unable to take pictures. I was bummed as I lost out on about a week of monitoring data. However, I could still hear baby birds in the nest cavity. They were sticking their heads out the hole and soon to fledge. However, something was wrong. Since I got home from my trip I noticed that I was not seeing the adult RHWOs. At first I thought maybe they were off feeding as they did seem to travel pretty far to feed at times – they would sometimes disappear for a few hours or even the day. Each day the baby birds were getting louder and louder in the nest and were calling all day long. I decided to go covert mode and watch the snag with a spotting scope a long way away in case I was making the parents nervous. Still no parents were showing up. Plus "my" male was pretty accustomed to me after spending all Fall and Winter with me - something was not right. Four days went by and still no adults and the babies were louder as ever but now were starting to get weaker in their calls. They still called often but it their calls had much less velocity. I decided to do some more investigating around the snag and about 30 feet from the snag I found the thing I did not want to find. About 4 to 5 wing feathers of a red-headed woodpecker on top of a fallen tree that was about 2 feet from a pond. I did not find the body but wing feathers in a pile was not a good sign. My assumption as that this was a Raccoon/Cat that had gotten up the tree and taken the female off the nest in the night. I found it odd that it didn't take the babies. Maybe some of the nest monitoring data coming back from research at Cedar Creek will help us shed light on what might be the culprit.

I never saw either adults again that summer. As I heard the baby birds getting weaker I tried to figure out my options to save them. My first thought was to find a foster parent in the form of a red-bellied woodpecker. They were nesting in the woods too and I tried to follow them for 3 days and could not find their nest hole. I then went to Nerstrand Big Woods Park to see if there was birds nesting by the campground that might be able to help. I found the nest alright.... However, it was close to 60 feet up in a sketchy tree above the dumpster at the campground. I was not going to be able to find a foster parent for these birds. Eventually the baby RHWOs died and my story I thought ended. I was crushed. I called my local friend, Keith Radel, who helped start the local Bluebird Recovery Program and knew very well what predators did to nesting birds. I asked Keith if tin wrapped around the tree would keep the raccoons off since I was under the assumption that it didn't stop them. The bluebird recovery program now uses conduit poles for their houses, but back in the 90s when I had a bluebird trail at the age of 13, they used to put houses on fence posts, trees, and posts and wrap the base with tin. I told Keith what happened to my RHWOs and I asked him if I should have tried to wrap the tree with tin and would it have actually worked. He did say if you wrap it correctly with overlapping just right that it worked back in the day to save bluebirds before they found conduit poles. So now I was living in the woulda-shoulda-coulda mentality. Why didn't I wrap that tree??.... If I knew what I know now I would have. I now wrap all my important woodpecker snags in my woods. One year I had a pileated woodpecker move in and have a nest and I wrapped it right away and got to watch them fledge. As birders we do a pretty good job of putting predator baffles on bluebird and wood duck houses. Why not give the same protection to woodpeckers that are in snags which are VERY easy for a predator to climb. Especially to these out-state woodpeckers that are in fragmented woods with I assume have more predator pressure that gems like Cedar Creek.

Then the next Spring I had my heart jump again as I noticed that a RHWO was hanging around the same snag and calling from the top of the snag. I thought - What are the chances that this was "my" woodpecker that I had overwinter and try to nest the year before? If it was, why was he such a dead-beat dad and not finishing raising his two chicks that died the previous year at my house? I have no way to prove it but again what are the chances a RHWO would come through migration, find this tree and call on

*Continued on page 2,*



## RhWR Volunteer Opportunities

The Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery (RhWR) has a need for many volunteers now and through the Spring. 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 (2021) – **All projects at**

**CCESR are cancelled until further notice.** Watch for information to monitor nest camera photos at home.

Email rhwracm@comcast.net to sign up for any of these volunteer opportunities or to ask any questions. Send this info to your friends and bird lovers.

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

# Save that Snag!

Place  
Stamp  
Here

## Next RhWR Steering Committee Meeting

The RhWR Steering Committee usually meets on the 3rd Wednesday of the month at 7:00 pm. The next *virtual* meeting will be on May 19, 2021 at 7:00 pm. If you would like to participate, please contact Siah St. Clair to be added to the call list. All are welcome and encouraged to attend. Please encourage friends to attend also. For information check our website at [www.RedheadRecovery.org](http://www.RedheadRecovery.org).

### Important Dates

Steering Committee Meeting	May 19, 2021
ACM Board Meeting	May 24, 2021
Research Team Meeting	TBA 2021

ALL meetings are *virtual* until further notice.

## 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.

*I'd like to contribute to Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis also!* Please add me as a member of the Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery (\$20) and as a donor to Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis (suggested donation \$20). Please send my membership information 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