



The REDHEAD

Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery



Fall 2025

Working to improve the future of Red-headed Woodpeckers

Vol. 19 No. 4

RHWO NEWS

Red-headed Woodpeckers at Camp Ripley

On October 8, 2025, Siah St. Clair and I visited Camp Ripley, about 100 miles northwest of Minneapolis. Our understanding was that Camp Ripley has had a large breeding



Photo by Siah St. Clair

population of Red-headed Woodpeckers for decades. The Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery has long sought more information about the woodpeckers at Camp Ripley. However, we had previously been told that many of the RHWOs there evidently nest in the "Impact Areas" used for artillery practice. Unexploded ordnance precludes access to these areas. We met with Department of Natural Resources staff there. Recent surveys there have found RHWOs along the margins of some Impact Areas and elsewhere at the 53,000-acre site. We met with DNR staff Joshua Pennington, Andrew Herberg, and Kaysie Malesky, Assistant Animal Survey Coordinator. They are interested in beginning a pilot project in 2026. There is interest in starting a program of color banding the woodpeckers and using a pole camera to survey nest activity and success. They are also interested in the assistance of volunteers who would make a long-term (several months) commitment to survey for and monitor Red-headed Woodpecker nests. They have two Motus towers on the site and would be interested in studying the movements of the birds, especially migration.

We were given a guided tour of areas where RHWOs were found during the breeding season. At the first stop, I was shocked to see at least two RHWOs and at the second stop three RHWOs. We saw at least two of the birds storing acorns. Unlike the northern pin oak acorns we are used to seeing the birds store, the RHWOs at Camp Ripley were caching red oak acorns.

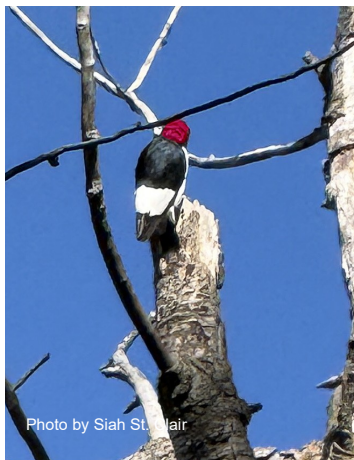


Photo by Siah St. Clair

Continued on next page, Fall

A Note from the Chair

Fall 2025

I hope you are all enjoying the fall weather and colors. The Red-headed Woodpeckers (RHWOs) I have seen lately in different parts of the region (Minnesota and Wisconsin) are all busy storing acorns in preparation for winter. Our count of acorn production this fall resulted in a below average number of pin oak acorns on the trees, and the woodpeckers have noticed, and the many have migrated away for the winter, leaving those who are staying very busy storing what acorns they can find.

It was a busy summer for volunteers with nest surveys, cutting portholes into nests, maintaining nest cameras, breeding bird surveys, habitat partner visits, and many other activities. As can be seen in the articles in this newsletter, late summer and fall have been busy with additional efforts at different places that have Red-headed Woodpecker nest sites. Some sites we already have ongoing work thanks to excellent volunteers. Some sites are new and have potential to extend the information we have about RHWO behaviors and nesting locations and success.

Perhaps we will see some of you at our table at the Minnesota Ornithological Union's paper session on December 6th. We will have materials for you to look through at our table. Watch for membership renewal letters at the end of November with information about some initial goals and plans for 2026.

Siah St. Clair, Steering Committee Chair

Photo of Kaysie Malesky and Jim Howitz
At Camp Ripley



Photo by Siah St. Clair

Note From the Editor

In this newsletter the two main articles deal with an area that have many Red-headed Woodpeckers. But you will note the areas are very different in their habitat. This demonstrates the complex nature of studying a species over a broad landscape. The Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery will be broadening our study of Red-headed Woodpeckers to include these diverse landscapes. The recovery of the Red-headed Woodpecker will need the help of individuals and organizations we refer to as Habitat Partners.

Jerry Bahls, Editor

Who Are Habitat Partners?

The concept of Habitat Partners has grown out of the need to work cooperatively with individuals and groups or organizations to help with the recovery of the Red-headed Woodpecker.

Individual land owners who have a commitment to helping preserve nature by setting aside land to preserve habitat for animal and bird species for their own enjoyment or the enjoyment of a local community is an example. This often takes the form of preserving favorite hunting and fishing areas they enjoyed over their lifetime. Areas they shared with close friends and relatives.

Organized groups or conservation organizations often pool their resources to save habitat that allows preservation of areas for hunting and fishing and in some cases just the plain enjoyment of "wild" habitat to observe animals is another example. Public parks and reserves are also areas that provide habitat for many varieties of animals.

The Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery (RhWR) has been seeking out these individuals, organizations and public land officials that currently support Red-headed Woodpeckers or have a high potential for attracting Red-headed Woodpeckers. The prime Habitat Partner for the last twenty-three years has been the University of Minnesota's Cedar Creek Ecosystem Science Reserve. However the RhWR has worked with Sherbourne NWR, Nerstrand Big Woods State Park, St. Croix State Park, Belwin Conservancy, Necedah NWR, Camp Ripley, University of Toledo, St. Croix State Park, Minnesota River Valley NWR and golf courses at Rutger's Bay Lake resort, Izaty's near Mille Lacs Lake, Madden's on Gull Lake, Cuyuna Rolling Hills

Golf Course in Crosby and Blackberry Ridge near Sartell, MN.

It is the goal in the coming year to expand our contacts with these and other Habitat Partners to work with them to help in their endeavors in preserving habitat for the Red-headed Woodpecker and other birds and animals in their areas.

If you are interested in working with the RhWR as a Habitat Partner, please contact us on our website or email us at rhwracm@comcast.net.

Fall, Continued from page 1

That RHWOs were present so late in the fall and storing acorns strongly indicates that they were attempting to overwinter. Overwintering birds offer many more opportunities for study than birds that only breed in an area.

We hope that we can assist the Camp Ripley researchers in studying RHWOs, and will be able to compare their results with what we are finding out about them elsewhere.

Jim Howitz

Membership Dues

Each Fall around Thanksgiving the Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery (RhWR) sends out a notice to remind our members that it is time to renew their membership. The response has always been gratifying. We receive most of our operating revenues from these membership dues.

- 1) Membership is \$20.00 (\$50 is preferred)/calendar year.
- 2) The newsletter is published for members only.

Send your membership application and renewal to -

Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery
PO Box 32172
Minneapolis, MN 55432-0172

Or make an electronic donation to the RhWR by going to the RhWR website <<https://redheadwoodpeckerrecovery.org/>> and clicking on **CONTRIBUTE** then **eDonate**.

Thank you for your continued support.

While all Red-headed Woodpeckers have a red head, not all woodpeckers with a red head are Red-headed Woodpeckers.



RhWR Contact Information

Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery

Mailing Address - Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery
PO Box 32172
Minneapolis, MN 55432-0172

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Red-headed Woodpeckers at Trempealeau National Wildlife Refuge

Trempealeau National Wildlife Refuge (TNWR) in Wisconsin is a 6,800 acre area where the Trempealeau River makes its way through marshy slews and flood plain swamps to the Mississippi River just south of Winona, Minnesota.



Richie Swanson is a Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery project (RhWR) volunteer who has been keeping track of Red-headed Woodpecker (RHWO) nesting activities at TNWR for several years. His very thorough reports (see RhWR web-site) are always very informative and show a cluster of RHWOs nesting (and overwintering) at TNWR.

On September 8th I visited Richie at TNWR and was shown many of the nesting sites that he had been documenting this past summer and in previous years. This Refuge is about 150 miles south of Cedar Creek ESR in East Bethel, MN, where we have been investigating and researching the RHWOs there since 2008. Comparing these two sites to see similarities and differences in RHWO behaviors was a very interesting, important, and learning experience.

The first and most obvious difference was the RHWO nesting habitat at TNWR. At Cedar Creek ESR the RHWOs nest almost exclusively in oak savanna habitat. At Trempealeau NWR the RHWOs nest mostly in marshy slews and flood plain swamps where the water level rises and falls with the rivers. My first planned visit was postponed for a month because the river was in flood, and the parking lot was under water and the nest sites were mostly inaccessible.

While these two locations (CCESR and TNWR) have very different habitats, they both have some similar characteristics that satisfy the nesting and roosting needs of RHWOs. These needs include:

1. Mostly open tree canopy and understory for foraging food.
2. Plentiful supply of dead trees with heart rot fungi present, making cavities easy to excavate.
3. Live trees nearby for new fledglings to hide in for their first few weeks.
4. Plentiful supply of invertebrate food for both nestlings and adults.
5. Winter acorn food supply (some years).

A second significant difference noted at TNWR was that the nest tree species being used by the RHWOs for nesting were almost completely different from those used at Cedar Creek. The only tree species used at TNWR that I saw that was the same as species used at Cedar Creek was black cherry. This suggests that tree species are not as important to RHWOs when



Continued on page 4, Trees

selecting a nest as is a tree's location and condition (soft heartwood and nearby accessible food supply and live trees).

Richie also pointed out a large widow-maker hanging in a tree that was used as a nest by RHWOs this past summer and successfully fledged young. Richie commented that this is the second widow-maker nest that he has documented fledging young.

While observing nest tree locations, Richie and I watched RHWOs caching Red Oak acorns, indicating that these RHWOs would be spending the winter at TNWR. One location where RHWOs were caching acorns in a grove of red oak trees was a long distance from any nest sites and Richie commented that he believes the RHWOs at this location roost during the winter near this grove of acorn trees and then move back to their distant nesting area in the spring. This would be new behavior we have not observed before.

Thanks to Richie Swanson for his work at this site. Obviously, documenting other RHWo nest sites, like TNWR, is critical to learning the different behaviors and habitats that RHWOs utilize to be reproductively successful.

Siah L St. Clair

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 November 19, 2025 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 Nov. 19, 2025
Outreach Committee TBA

ALL meetings are *virtual* until further notice.

Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery
PO Box 32172
Minneapolis MN 55432-0172

Save that Snag!

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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 55432-0172

Memo line: Redhead Woodpecker Recovery or RhWR