



The REDHEAD

Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery



Spring 2026

Working to improve the future of Red-headed Woodpeckers

Vol. 20 No. 2

RHWO NEWS

The Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery project budgeted funds for this summer (2026) for a research technician to work with the DNR staff at Camp Ripley to conduct research on Red-headed Woodpeckers. This position will begin on May 18 and end in mid-August. Camp Ripley has a large nesting population of Red-headed Woodpeckers. (See Summer 2017 The REDHEAD). This position will be funded through Central Lakes College in Brainerd, MN. The RhWR would like to thank Dr. Bill Faber for his help in coordinating this effort. Below is a short Bio and a thank you from the person hired for making this employment experience possible.

Hi, my name is Della Koep. I am an outdoor enthusiast who enjoys birding, hiking, fishing, and horseback riding. I am currently a Natural Resources student at Central Lakes College and will be graduating this spring. This summer, I will be working at Camp Ripley monitoring Red-headed Woodpeckers. I plan to pursue a career in ornithology and hope to obtain my banding permit.

Last year, I had the opportunity to intern at Camp Ripley, where I gained valuable experience and developed a strong passion for working with birds. Since then, I have sought out as much hands-on experience as possible, working with or monitoring species such as American Kestrels, Osprey, Common Loons, Trumpeter Swans, Eastern Bluebirds, and other passerines.

I am very excited for this upcoming summer and grateful to the Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery group for this opportunity.

The RhWR is looking forward to working with Della in 2026 and the rest of the Habitat Partner team working at Camp Ripley.



A Note from the Chair

Winter 2026

As I write this it is exactly 100 degrees warmer outside than it was when I wrote the last Notes from the Chair in January. The Red-headed Woodpeckers that overwintered in this area are flycatching today for early spring insects, like the dragonfly I saw outside my window a few minutes ago. Red-headed Woodpeckers that migrated away for the winter will not return until the first two weeks of May, when nesting season begins.

I was at Camp Ripley two days ago with Jim Howitz to demonstrate to DNR staff the methods we used for many years at Cedar Creek ESR to successfully and safely mist net Red-headed Woodpeckers. We saw at least two Red Heads while there. They are planning on capturing and color banding many of the Red Heads there this summer. Doing this will help to learn if individual Red Heads there have site fidelity from year to year, as well as nest fidelity and have the same mate from year to year. We will also learn if their behavior is the same as at other locations. Assisting the staff at Camp Ripley will be a college student whose wages we are funding for the summer to help study the Red-headed Woodpeckers at Camp Ripley. Look for this student's bio in the adjacent column in this newsletter. Thank you to everyone who contributed to our membership and fund drive to make this and other efforts possible.

We will be busy this summer expanding our Habitat Partners program, connecting with people who see Red-headed Woodpeckers and others who may know where some are nesting, and others who are interested in adapting habitat to attract nesting Red Heads. Contact us if you see Red Heads so we can add general locations to our map, or if you want to learn and/or help more.

Siah St. Clair, Steering Committee Chair

"Save that Snag!"

Often you will see "Save that Snag!" on Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery (RhWR) publications. You might ask why this slogan?

Over the years that the RhWR has been studying Red-headed Woodpeckers (RHWOs), it has been observed that a large majority of nest holes have been made in large dead trees, i.e., Snags. Very few are made in live trees and those are often made where a dead branch has broken off and the resulting spot has decayed providing a spot

Continued on page 4, Soft

Note From the Editor

The Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery (RhWR) has been working to restore the population of Red-headed Woodpeckers (RHWO) for almost 20 years. We have funded several researchers looking for clues to improve the survival prospects for young and adult birds. Most of this work has been done at Cedar Creek Ecosystem Science Reserve (Cedar Creek ESR). We thank them for the opportunity to do this work on their site. When our offer to continue funding RHWO research at the Cedar Creek ESR site for 2026 to 2029 was turned down in December of 2024 we became aware that working at primarily only one site may be skewing our vision of actions that will improve the chances for RHWO recovery. We then began reviewing our approach to research activities and in January of 2025 set a planning goal to expand our Habitat Partners program to include new areas where we might include new research activities across Minnesota and the Midwest.

The RhWR membership and leadership are passionate individuals about RHWOs and are anxious to see some positive results from that portion of our 20 years of efforts that were accomplished at Cedar Creek ESR. While we were funding research work at Cedar Creek ESR our members and volunteers were also collecting extensive data on our own, making observations, producing photographs and videos, and other activities. As a result, collectively, over the past years, substantial and exciting research results have been accumulated.

While there have been many promises over several years that those research results would be published very soon by researchers (other than by two Master's theses) that we had provided funds for, publishing has not occurred. This has been very disappointing and frustrating. But we still have all the information, observations, and materials we collected ourselves. Recently, however, the Board of Directors of the RhWR was notified by the University of Minnesota that a University policy prohibits the RhWR from publishing or presenting in any way (website, newsletter, presentations) any information we have learned about Red-headed Woodpeckers at Cedar Creek ESR without the lead researcher's permission. We are certain that with the permits we had, as well as other circumstances, that the information and materials gathered by RhWR over the years is owned by RhWR and its volunteers, and is not encompassed by this policy.

For this reason, the RhWR has retained the services of an intellectual property attorney. This attorney is communicating with the University to identify the extensive information the RhWR has legally accumulated over the last 20 years so that we can make it available to our members and the general public. We have no desire to circumvent any researcher from publishing their data but feel that the public deserves the right to know the significance of the RhWR members' information and observations.

It is our desire to seek a quick solution to this conflict. With this issue completed, the RhWR will begin publishing information and observations of RHWO behavior in different formats including on our revamped website which will be turned on when this issue with the University is resolved.

Jerry Bahls, Editor

Report to Membership from Treasurer

It has been some time since the Treasurer gave a report to the general membership on the financial health of the Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery (RhWR). Below is the financial status of the RhWR.

The current (as of 4/11/2026) balance for the RhWR is \$30044.91. Calendar year 2026 Revenue is \$2490 (from member donations). We currently have 180 members. Members who have renewed for 2026 is 109. Average member renewals for last 5 years (2021 - 2025) is 105.8. Income for the 2026 membership drive is \$12,130 (year not complete). Average income from membership drives (last 5 years [2021 - 2025]) is \$13674.15.

Calendar year 2026 Expenses is currently \$714.70. Expenses for 2025 were \$10612.41. The budgeted Expenses for

RhWR Contact Information

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2026 is \$18800. Estimated Expenses for 2026 include about \$700 for Communications (Newsletter, website, postage); about \$800 for Insurance; \$15000 for Research; about \$2000 for Outreach Committee (Habitat Partners); and Miscellaneous of \$300.

As can be seen our current balance will easily cover our budgeted expenses. While it is anticipated the RhWR will carry over much of this balance into 2027, more may be allocated to other research in 2026.

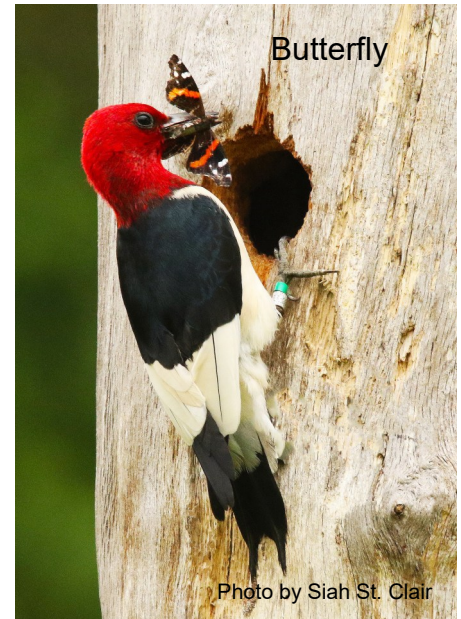
Treasurer, Jerry Bahls

What Do Red-headed Woodpeckers Eat?

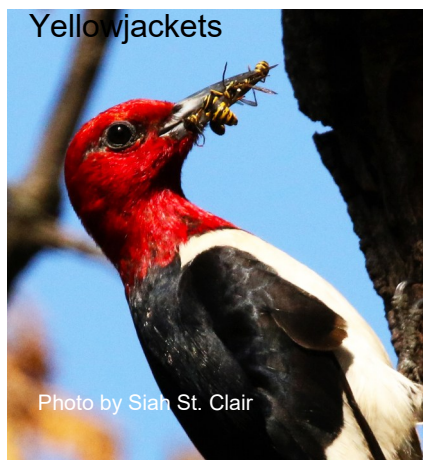
Red-headed Woodpeckers eat different foods and use different methods to acquire their food than almost all other woodpecker species. Around 95% of their diet in warm months (especially at the nest for nestlings) is invertebrates, but Red Heads seek out different kinds of invertebrates than other woodpecker species. Most woodpecker species peck holes into trees and other plants to acquire their food - big holes like the Pileated Woodpeckers excavate to smaller holes made by Downy Woodpeckers in trees and galls while searching for insects that live in hidden places.

Red-headed Woodpeckers are one of only two woodpecker species that prefer to flycatch for their food (Lewis's Woodpecker also does this). When few insects are flying Red-headed Woodpeckers use gleaning from the ground, on tree branches, and on other plants to find invertebrate food. As a result, most of the diet of Red-headed Woodpeckers (especially nestlings) is a smorgasbord of exposed and flying insects and other invertebrates. Examples I have photographed in Red-headed Woodpecker beaks include:

1. Butterflies and Moths (Lepidoptera)
2. Dragonflies and Damselflies (Odonata)
3. Bees and Wasps (Hymenoptera)
4. Mayflies and Caddisflies (Ephemeroptera and Trichoptera)
5. Cicadas and other true bugs (Hemipterans)
6. Grasshoppers, Crickets, and Roaches (Orthoptera)
7. Beetles of all kinds, such as Stag Beetles and Carrion Beetles (Coleoptera)
8. Flies like Horse Flies, Deer Flies, and Crane Flies (Diptera)
9. Spiders and Harvestmen (Arachnids)
10. Snails (Gastropods)

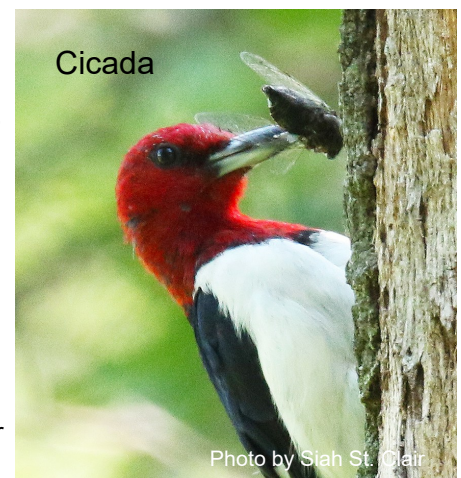


The food other than invertebrates (about 5%) that Red-headed Woodpeckers eat during warm months includes berries and nuts like acorns, but much of this depends on these foods' presence in the woodpecker's territory and is often only available later in the summer during second brood nesting, if second broods are attempted. For example, cherries ripen in late August, Bur Oak acorns ripen in early August. Blueberries and Juneberries become ripe during the last week or so that first brood nestlings are in the nest and are not available for most of their nestling stage.



Cold weather changes everything for Red-headed Woodpecker diet. Exposed invertebrates diminish as it becomes colder, and acorns and other nuts eventually become about 95% of the diet, with invertebrates becoming less and less until they are essentially gone for Red Head food getting methods. Red-headed Woodpeckers spend most of their fall season caching large amounts of acorns for a winter food supply or preparing to migrate several hundred miles south where food is available (if a good supply of acorns is not present at their summer location).

Red-headed Woodpeckers are fairly unique in their diet needs across the seasons. This may be one reason why their population has diminished to such an extent as the habitats needed to fulfil their diet needs has so greatly declined.



Siah St. Clair

Soft, continued from page 1

where the wood is soft and more easily pecked out.

These dead trees can be of many different tree species. After Dutch Elm Disease went through the east and Midwest the dead elm trees were a boon for RHWOs and many were utilized as nesting sites.

In addition to nesting these trees were used as roosting sites. Studies are being done to determine how many different roosting sites are used by adults and newly fledged young. This information will help land managers to assess whether a parcel of savanna is a suitable site for RHWOs.

RHWOs flycatch insects during much of the breeding season. They sit near the top of a dead tree scouting for flying insects. Several different insect species being fed to young were caught in this manner. It is important that they are able to see in all directions and large dead trees that have lost some nearby limbs afford an excellent viewing platform. A reason to "Save that Snag".

Saving a snag can be very important for the survival of this iconic woodpecker. Thus our mantra "Save that Snag!".

Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery

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 May 20, 2026 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 May 20, 2026
Outreach Committee TBA

ALL meetings are *virtual* until further notice.

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Save that Snag!

Place
Stamp
Here



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