



The REDHEAD

Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery



Summer 2025

Working to improve the future of Red-headed Woodpeckers

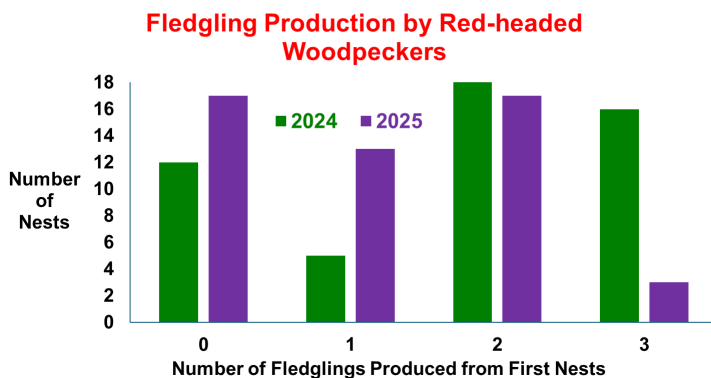
Vol. 19 No. 3a

RHWO NEWS

The 2025 Red-headed Woodpecker Breeding Season

This has been a strange breeding season for the Red-headed Woodpeckers at Cedar Creek. All or nearly all of the woodpeckers present at Cedar Creek during the breeding season attempted to overwinter there. So, there were lots of birds in early May when the birds really got down to the business of nesting. In 2024 we had 62 breeding pairs and a total population of about 125 birds. This year we also had about 62 pairs and 125 total birds.

We noticed that there appeared to be far fewer fledglings produced this year than last year. All our early nests either have had fledglings or failed. As of August 4, we have found about 59 fledglings. Last year, we found 89 fledglings from the early nests. (See Chart)



We do not know why there are fewer fledglings this year. Anecdotal observations suggest insects, such as dragonflies, grasshoppers, beetles, and caterpillars, have become less common, particularly this year. There are still a few late nests that could produce fledglings. We will soon find out if the relatively low fledgling success continues through the rest of the breeding season.

Jim Howitz



Photo by Siah St. Clair

A Note from the Chair

Summer 2025

I hope everyone is enjoying the summer and getting out to experience nature and possibly seeing Red-headed Woodpeckers wherever you are.

We are hearing from a number of places in western Wisconsin and around Minnesota that are seeing nesting Red-headed Woodpeckers this summer. One location has several pair but most locations have one pair at a nest. If anyone sees Red Heads let us know how many and where.

At Cedar Creek Ecosystem Science Reserve in East Bethel, MN, a number of the more than 100 adult Red Heads are working on second nests. It appears that the number of fledglings will be significantly lower than last year, although the number of actual nests (1st and 2nd broods) will only be slightly lower than 2024. Every year is very different regarding nest productivity for Red-headed Woodpeckers. It is hard to decipher the cause from year to year. It may be nest tree availability, presence of forage-able invertebrates for food, predator population cycles, weather, and/or other factors.

Thanks to our volunteers who are helping to find Red-headed Woodpecker nests and to breeding bird survey volunteers who have spotted 3,300 individual birds from over 100 species this summer.

Siah St. Clair, Steering Committee Chair

Who is the RhWR?

The Redheaded Woodpecker Recovery (RhWR) has about 177 members (this varies by about 10 members/year) and in 2025 is made up of about 81 women and about 93 men and 3 organizations. Many of the men and women's partners are also considered members but aren't counted because membership is based upon households and not individuals. We also have a few gift memberships but aren't tracked as such.

The average donation for each member in 2025 was \$47.68 when the large donors (> \$500) are removed. Large donors (5) contributed \$7268.92 or an average of \$1455.78/donor. We have 34 donors who have contributed \$100 - \$500. We have 40 donors who have contributed less than \$40. The smallest donation was \$20 in 2025.

Continued on page 2, Donations

Note From the Editor

The revised RhWR website is coming along nicely and we feel you will really like the new format and content. Speaking of content please let us know how you like the current content. Also let us know what you think is missing.

We apologize for the tardiness of this newsletter. A previous edition had some errors that needed to be corrected. An electronic version of it had been sent to members and they are asked to delete it asap.

Jerry Bahls, Editor

Donations, Continued from Page 1

We have had donations as small as \$5 in the past. These statistics are shown for your information and do not mean to lessen the lower donors' contribution because we know many are giving as much as they can afford. We thank all donors with the same sincerity. We could not do the amazing research we have done over the last 18 years without each of your donations.

Most of the donations come from Minnesota residents (155). Members also come from these other states - Wisconsin (8), Missouri (3), Illinois (2), Iowa (1), California (1), Indiana (1), Michigan (1), New York (1), Ohio (1), and Texas (1). We have received correspondence from residents of Florida, Nebraska, Pennsylvania and Manitoba. We encourage bird lovers from across the country to join us in helping restore this iconic bird back to its populations in the mid 1900's. We know there are many Red-headed Woodpeckers in many other states including Nebraska, North and South Dakota, Kansas and Pennsylvania. While the research we have done may not pertain to everywhere in the country, much does and can help restore populations where they are low or once existed.

While everyone does not renew each year, we consider you a member for 5 years after you gave your last donation. You are then put in our inactive category. In 2025 we received 111 renewals and new memberships. In 2024 the number was 103. In 2023 it was 105. In 2022 it was 104. In 2021 it was 125.

Jerry Bahls

RhWR Fund Raiser

The Redheaded Woodpecker Recovery's (RhWR) fund raiser is **Jim Stengel**. He can be contacted at **612 721-9083** or at **jbstengel66@gmail.com**. If you know of an organization or individual that will donate funds for Red-headed Woodpecker research, please contact Jim.

The Wilson Journal of Ornithology 131(4):774-788, 2019

Red-headed Woodpecker (*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*) winter roost-site selection in a burned forest stand

Benjamin Nickley^{1*} and Lesley P. Bulluck^{1,2}

ABSTRACT - In temperate regions, winter is characterized by high thermoregulatory demands and low food availability. For woodpeckers, winter survival depends on selecting habitat that provides both suitable roost trees and adequate food. The Red-headed Woodpecker (*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*) has experienced precipitous declines across much of its range in the past 50 yr, yet causes of declines remain elusive. Although previous studies have focused primarily on the breeding season, understanding winter roost-site requirements is crucial for the maintenance of Red-headed Woodpecker populations across the full annual cycle. Our study investigated winter roost-site characteristics at 3 spatial scales (roost patch, tree, and cavity) in a 41 ha fire-affected forest stand located in northern Virginia. From February to April of 2016 we tracked Red-headed Woodpeckers to 42 roost-sites during evening surveys. To determine the features driving roost-site selection, we compared vegetation surrounding the roost to random sites within the same forest stand, and occupied roost snags (standing dead trees) were compared to the closest available snag. Cavity height and orientation were also examined. We modelled roost-site selection at both the patch and tree scales using logistic regression and identified important variables and their influence by estimating regression coefficients and their model-averaged parameter weights. Habitat within the patch surrounding roost trees had higher basal area of snags and mast-producing trees compared to random sites. Red-headed Woodpeckers selected roost snags with signs of decay and showed preferences based on snag taxon. Our findings indicate that managing land that produces and retains both snags and mature mast-producing trees will benefit overwintering populations of Red-headed Woodpeckers. This study provides the first detailed analysis of winter roost-site selection in this declining species.

¹ Department of Biology, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA, USA

² Center for Environmental Studies, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA, USA

* Corresponding author: bnickley4@gmail.com

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Factoid - Red-headed Woodpeckers are weak excavators and require decadent (decayed) substrates to excavate their cavities (Bent AC. 1964. Life histories of North American woodpeckers. New York (NY): Dover Publications; p. 195-210.).

RhWR Contact Information

Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery

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

Website Address - <https://redheadwoodpeckerrecovery.org>

Chair - Siah St. Clair stclairs@comcast.net 763 234-6146
Treasurer - Jerry Bahls rhwracm@comcast.net 763 355-8726
Corporation & Editor rhwracm@comcast.net 763 355-8726

Red-headed Woodpecker Nest Portholes in 2025

In 2017 The REDHEAD newsletter published an article about the first portholes placed in Red-headed Woodpecker (RHW) nests at Cedar Creek Ecosystem Science Reserve (Cedar Creek ESR). During this spring and summer of 2025 nine more portholes have been installed at active Red-headed Woodpecker nests. These portholes (over 70 in all now) are very important in creating the ability to gain access to nestlings to learn more about RHW biology and behavior.

As can be seen in the pictures with this article, portholes are cut into the nest cavity while there are eggs present. After the porthole is cut it is closed and sealed and not re-opened until nestlings are a



Photo by Siah St. Clair



Photo by Siah St. Clair

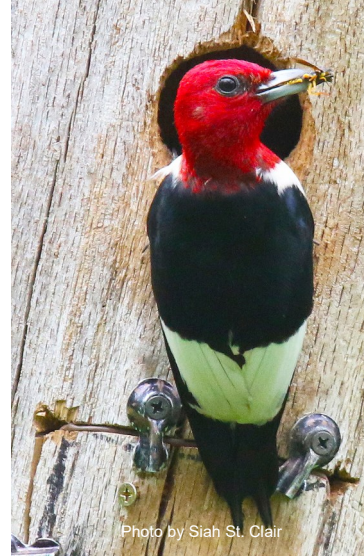


Photo by Siah St. Clair

few days from fledging (usually 35 -40 days). During the waiting time the adults are completely at ease with the presence of the porthole. The picture here shows an adult bringing food to the nestlings with the porthole under its tail. No adults have abandoned their nest after a porthole was installed at Ce-

dar Creek ESR.

Once the waiting time is over the nestlings are removed from their nest through the porthole. They are weighed and measured, small blood samples are taken, an aluminum band and color bands are placed on their legs, and a transmitter is harnessed onto their back. Then the nestlings are placed back into the nest and the porthole is closed again.

In a few days the nestlings fledge from the nest, and the transmitter allows their travels to be tracked, both day and night. By tracking their travels many questions can be answered. How far do they travel? Where do they spend the night? How many of the nestlings survive? As these questions and others are answered the specific habitat needs for young Red-headed Woodpecker fledgling survival can be determined.



Photo by Siah St. Clair



Photo by Siah St. Clair

Red-headed Woodpecker population numbers are way down in Minnesota (>90%). Red-headed Woodpecker fledglings are the RHWs of tomorrow, so knowing what the habitat needs are for their survival during their first few weeks out of the nest is very important for the future of RHWs.

Siah L. St. Clair

RhWR Volunteer Opportunities

The Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery (RhWR) always has a need for volunteers. It appears that appealing to you through this newsletter is not hitting home! So again. No organization can exist without new volunteers each year to replace those that are no longer able to contribute. Please let us know that you can help run the organization. **WE NEED YOU!**

Here is a short list and a very brief description of the volunteers we need and their duties -

Steering Committee participant - Join Steering Committee meetings and contribute your opinions

Outreach Committee member - Participate in Outreach Committee meetings

Newsletter Editor or Assistant Editor - Coordinate publication of newsletter

Webmaster or Assistant Webmaster - Manage the RhWR website

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

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 17, 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	Sep 17, 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!

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