



The REDHEAD

Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery



Winter 2025

Working to improve the future of Red-headed Woodpeckers

Vol. 19 No. 1

RHWO NEWS

Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery: It Is Not Just About Woodpeckers

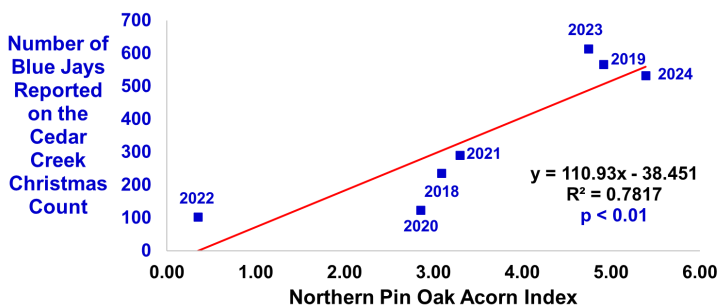
I have been working my way through the monster tome, "The Breeding Birds of Minnesota" by Lee Pfannmuller, Gerald Niemi, and Janet Green. In the Blue Jay account, I came across the following: "Some biologists also believe that the Jay's annual movements are best explained by its response to annual mast production, but studies have failed to demonstrate a correlation at the local or regional scale..." Here they referenced the "Birds of the World" Blue Jay species account.

It occurred to me that we have seven years of data from our annual acorn counts that show that Red-headed Woodpecker overwintering populations correlate strongly with northern pin oak acorn production. I also recalled a rather puzzling correlation between the number of Red-headed Woodpeckers and Blue Jays reported on the annual Cedar Creek Christmas Bird Count (CBC). So, I looked at the relationship between the northern pin oak acorn crop and Blue Jay numbers on the Cedar Creek CBC.

I found a significant correlation between the number of Blue Jays on the CBC and the northern pin oak acorn index (Chart 1). This index is based on the number of

Chart 1

**Northern Pin Oak Acorn Index and Blue Jays
Reported on the Cedar Creek Christmas Count**



acorns counted in 30 seconds, and the correlation is between the number of Blue Jays and the number of acorns per tree. I also found a significant relation between the number of Blue Jays on the Christmas Bird Count and the total number of acorns produced by the 100 northern pin oaks initially selected for the survey (Chart 2). Since we began the acorn survey in 2018, 22 of the 100 northern pin

Continued on next column, Correlation

A Note from the Chair

Winter 2025

The Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery had its annual meeting two days ago, as I write this. Officers and Directors were elected, a budget for 2025 was approved unanimously, and goals were also approved for the new year. An annual report for 2024 was presented. Over 2,083 hours of volunteer work was accomplished in 2024. Thank you to many volunteers for helping to improve the future of Red-headed Woodpeckers.

Thank you also to all who have renewed membership and made donations, as well as to those whose memberships and donations are still coming in. We have a big year planned, with expansion of outreach with habitat partners and education activities. The website will have some substantive changes and additions that will be of interest to everyone. Watch for news on that front.

We will be continuing our volunteer work with Red-headed Woodpecker nest surveys at Cedar Creek ESR, nest cameras, breeding bird surveys at Cedar Creek, acorn production surveys to predict RHWO winter decisions to migrate or stay on location, and much more.

Best wishes for the new year. Hope to see you in the field helping Red-headed Woodpeckers to increase their numbers through habitat work, education, and research activities.

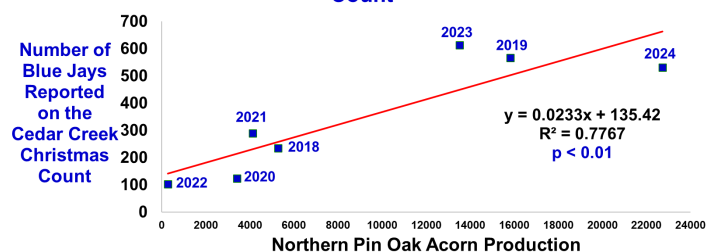
Siah St. Clair, Steering Committee Chair

Correlation, Continued from previous column

Oaks we started with have died. So, this correlation is

Chart 2

**Northern Pin Oak Acorn Production and Number of
Blue Jays Reported on the Cedar Creek Christmas
Count**



Between the number of Blue Jays and the total number of

Continued on page 2, Counts

Acorns found in a certain area.

Christmas Counts generally find more birds per year over time, as more participants get better at finding more birds. I looked at the Cedar Creek Christmas Bird Count data from 1991 through 2024. I found no relationship between the number of participants or number of hours in the field and either the number of jays or woodpeckers counted. So, the relationship between the number of acorns and



Photo by Siah St. Clair

the number of birds present during the CBC looks to be real.

With Red-headed Woodpeckers, the effect of acorns on the overwintering population is clear. More of the breeding woodpeckers remain when the acorn crop is good.



Photo by Siah St. Clair

They may be joined by Red-headed Woodpeckers from elsewhere, but that is hard to prove.

Blue Jays are always present all year around, but large numbers are seen apparently migrating, especially in the fall. Presumably, more jays remain where the acorn crop is good, and perhaps other jays join them there and leave in the spring.

So, our work with Red-headed Woodpeckers appears to be shedding light on Blue Jays as well.

Jim Howitz

Note From the Editor

Preparing for an event I wanted a map that shows where Red-headed Woodpeckers (RHWO) were known to be. Since I have a basic knowledge of ArcGIS, a map making program, I decided to make a map that shows the location birders recorded sightings of RHWOs on eBird. I decided to use the data from July 2024, since it was recent and it would represent where RHWOs were breeding. After some technical difficulties, the Minnesota map (only the Metro area is shown on the last page) was generated. Each small red dot represents one report of one (a very few represent two or more) RHWO. In looking at the map it occurred to me that there are far too many RHWOs reported around the Metro area than I knew to be there. Granted the dots exaggerate how many there are because they cover a relatively large area on the map, giving the perception that there are more there. There may be a few RHWOs that are not paired that may be flying around the area. But usually these are looking for a partner and will stay near other RHWOs. But we do not believe there are many (but some) that fly more than a few miles. Thus it is not likely that a few birds generate the larger number of sightings outside areas where we know they are breeding, especially in July a primary breeding period.

In studying the eBird data it soon becomes clear that often when birders are in small groups (> 2) they all post sightings on eBird, thus giving the appearance of multiple birds in the data. But they highly probably are observing the same bird. This data can be removed with some effort.

This still leaves more probable sightings than there are birds. Because the data is usually entered on a cell phone there can be some data entry errors (fat fingers). These can't be corrected and are probably fairly small.

Finally, it amazes me that when meeting people at events the relatively large number that mis-identify a Red-bellied Woodpecker as a RHWO. This would explain the many RHWOs seen in the metro areas and in forested areas, a place RHWO (a savannah bird) are not likely to be. Also Metro areas represent more people and more people generate more sightings. Please continue to report sightings on eBird, but be careful of your entry. We need to educate all better. Remember that all RHWOs have a red head, but not all red-headed woodpeckers are RHWOs!

Jerry Bahls, Editor

RhWR Contact Information

Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery

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Adult Red-headed Woodpecker Trains Fledglings to Find Food

Photos and Story by Siah St. Clair

On July 16 of 2024, in mid-morning, I noticed an adult Red-headed Woodpecker (RHW) sitting on a post of a barbwire fence that runs along Durrant Street on the east side of Cedar Creek Ecosystem Science Reserve (CCESR). Seeing the RHWs on this fence is cause for anxiety as the Woodpeckers sometimes search for insects on the asphalt roadway and several have been found dead after being hit by cars.

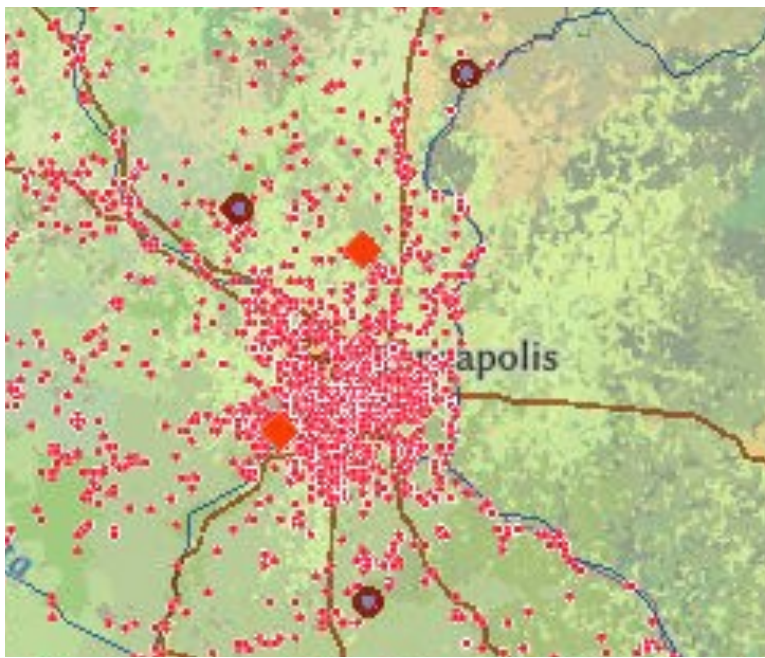


My anxiety increased as first one and then a second fledgling joined the adult on the fence. As I was quickly taking pictures I was thinking "No, mom or dad, don't teach your children to find



food in the roadway."

My fears disappeared as the adult flew down onto the fire-break trail that was on the other side of the fence. The adult did not feed the fledglings, but they saw it catching grasshoppers and other insects in the short grass of the fire-break, and soon they began to try their luck. They learned quickly that this is an acquired skill, but they kept trying and soon improved with some success.



The large red diamonds are Christmas Bird Count Circles.

The large purple circles with a gray center are Habitat Partner sites.

The small red dots are July 2024 eBird observations of RhWOs. Each dot represents one observation.

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 March 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 Mar. 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!

Place
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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