



# The REDHEAD



## Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery

Summer 2011

A Special Committee of the Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis

Vol. 5 No. 3

### BREAKING NEWS

## Red Heads Return to Chester Woods Park

For the first time in years, there have been numerous reports of red-headed woodpeckers (RHWO's) seen at Chester Woods Park, an Olmsted County park near Eyota MN. Historically, after the flood control reservoir was filled in 1995, a grove of trees was intentionally drowned providing excellent, safe habitat. RHWO's nested there in fair numbers for several years. Eventually, those trees became unsuitable for whatever reason (too rotten?) and the birds moved on. Despite active searching, they hadn't been seen in the park for several years.

In the autumn of 2007, Joel Dunnette, Jim Peterson and Ruthann Yaeger of Rochester Zumbro Valley Audubon (ZVAS) formed a plan in consultation with Jerry Bahls of the Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery RhWR program. They presented their plan to the park staff and received permission to start a recovery program at Chester Woods. Several suitable trees in appropriate areas were girdled with the hope of attracting RHWO's to the park again.

This summer, several canoeists reported seeing multiple RHWO's, and two of the park staff, Director Tom Eckdahl and seasonal naturalist, Clarissa Jocelyn, have confirmed those sightings. ZVAS plans on searching for the nest sites as soon as weather and schedules permit.

While we do not know whether our recovery efforts were responsible for the return of these beautiful birds, it can't have hurt, and we are delighted to have them back!

We'll keep you all posted.

Ruthann Yaeger

### Life Cycle of EAB

"Adult emerald ash borers lay their eggs and live as larvae under the bark of ash trees or in bark crevices<sup>1</sup>, thus becoming an additional food resource for woodpeckers. Emerald ash borers only lay their eggs in trees that are 2 cm diameter at breast height (DBH, considered at 1.3 m high) or larger. The eggs are laid from mid-May to mid-August<sup>1</sup>. The eggs hatch into larvae in about two weeks after being laid, feed under the bark from July to autumn,

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### A Note from the Chair

A Bird in the Hand.....

Exciting news from our Cedar Creek program. Ari Waldstein and her sister Sasha successfully trapped and banded a RHWO adult (see picture below) just a few weeks ago. This is our first banded bird and it was conveniently located in Burn Unit 401 not far from Highway 26. Keep your eyes open for a RHWO with yellow and blue plastic bands on its left leg and red and silver bands on its right leg.

And even more exciting news. Ari and Sasha were also successful in using our new nest camera to take a number of videos of young birds just about ready to fledge. It was quite difficult holding a swaying 30-foot pole with a tiny camera on the end and inserting the camera into the nest cavities but they were very successful. Bravo! The videos are available through U-Tube (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E2oCHfs1eLl>, click on AriW1101 and view all 10) and will be linked to our main web site. For the past three years we had suspected the average clutch to be only one or two birds, given how small in diameter most nest limbs were. But Ari's research revealed between three and four young crammed into most cavities. That was quite a surprise. And that's what research is all about.

Finally, Mary Miller and I had a very successful visit to the Belwin Conservancy, near Afton, MN. This is a large private holding of land part of which is being turned back into oak savanna for RHWO. Work only began a few years ago, but already things look promising. More about this in our next *The REDHEAD*.

Chet Meyers, Chair



Photo by Ari Waldstein

## Note From the Editor

This issue's topic is "Can we get RHWO to use nestboxes?". However it will be delayed until the fall because the Editor was blessed with a very fine article describing a day of RhWR's survey work at Cedar Creek.

A second article that is very exciting news for our program. The Zumbro Valley Audubon Society efforts to attract the red-headed woodpeckers back to Chester Woods Park appears to be successful. See the report on page 1 in the new "Breaking News" byline. While putting this addition together the Editor realized that religating the news about the return of RHWO's to Chester Woods to page 2 and continuing the "Editors Notes" on page 1 was absurd. Hence the switch.

Also note the news in the Chair's column. A follow-up article to last month's feature issue is also included.

The next good news for the Editor was two fine articles sent to us essentially ready for publication. Thereby saving the Editor many hours of work and providing you with good information. Don't let this be a one time occurrence. Send us articles about RHWO's using nestboxes. Suggest nestbox designs (drawings or sketches would be helpful) for us to try. We all thank you for your efforts.

Jerry Bahls, Editor

## Membership Dues

The Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery (RhWR) receives almost all of its revenue from its membership dues. The RhWR dues for new members are \$10/yr. New members will receive a packet, which will include the new RhWR button and sew-on patch as well as the latest "The REDHEAD". Our membership year is July 1 - June 30 (all memberships will expire on June 30 of the year the membership was established). Renewals will remain at \$5/year and will expire on June 30 of the period of renewal. Look for future announcements regarding lifetime memberships and renewal dues.

New memberships and renewals can be made by sending your name, address and e-mail address or fill in the membership application form on the last page of this newsletter to the address below. Please make check payable to Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis RhWR.

Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis  
RhWR  
PO Box 3801  
Minneapolis, MN 55403-0801

Thank you for your continued support.



Photo by Ruthann Yeager

ZVAS volunteers girdling a tree.



Photo by Amber Burnette

RHWO Catches Moth at Cedar Creek

## RhWR Contact Information

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and develop into adults in one to two years<sup>2</sup>. The adults emerge in May and June. From mid-summer to autumn, the larvae feed on phloem, creating S-shaped galleries under the bark. The larvae's feeding prevents the tree from properly translocating water and nutrients, girdling the tree and eventually leading to its death<sup>2,3</sup>.

1. Cappaert, D. et al. "Emerald ash borer ..." *American Entomologist* 51.3 (2005): 152-165.

2. Poland, T. M., and D. G. McCullough. "Emerald Ash Borer: Invasion ..." *Journal of Forestry* 104.3 (2006): 118-124.

3. Quote from Maria G. Herman, Thesis, The University of Toledo, 2010.

# Hunting Red-headed Woodpecker Nests

Clay Christensen

July 13, 2011

I went into the woods with a couple of women this past June and, at my age, that's as close as I'll get to a racy story. Bonnie, Val and I were conducting a Red-headed Woodpecker (RHWO) nest survey at the Cedar Creek Ecosystem Science Reserve near East Bethel. An intern had been to the site to film RHWO nestlings and marked the nest areas with little black circles on a satellite image map. There were six such circles in our assigned section of the map. Our goal was to locate the specific nest trees, gather data about the tree and its habitat and see if there were other nest sites nearby.

This is a University of Minnesota study area, so Bonnie has a dashboard pass and a pass to carry with her while we're there.

We found the gate that led into our assigned survey area. It had 2 or 3 inches of standing water beneath it, which made climbing over a rather delicate maneuver.

Cedar Creek is in the Anoka Sand Plain. The access roads and trails are all sand, so getting close to the marked areas wasn't too much of a challenge. Getting near the nest tree itself, however, was a different matter.

RHWOs seem to prefer nesting in oak savannahs, groups of trees in the midst of shorter undergrowth, witch hazel bushes, willows, poison ivy and the like. Navigating this undergrowth is where the cross-country hiking gets interesting. Adding to the challenge is fallen timber concealed beneath more than three feet of dense growth. You have to really watch your step. You often step over a large limb only to discover there's another just as large right where you were going to plant your foot. Bonnie calls them ankle-breakers. Those branches and limbs have been charred by regular controlled burns, so you'll get charcoal streaks on your pants at least. All in all, there's a lot of stumbling around on my part.

RHWOs are cavity nesters. They seem to favor half-dead oak trees or totally dead standing snags. The nest hole can be anywhere from eight to 80 feet up in a tree that usually has very short understory growth beneath it. This may be so the birds can see potential predators, or so they can exit the nest hole and drop down a good ways to gain speed before they have to level off and flap their wings.

From the entry road, we had seen an RHWO fly toward one of the survey spots on our map. We wanted to get close to where that little black circle was marked on the map, and wait and watch. After walking north about a quarter mile into our territory, Bonnie and I left the road and headed to the west, cross-country. Val had it easier. She just went farther up the road to another potential site.

The site Bonnie and I headed toward was about 500 feet away through waist-high brush. There was a lot of stumbling, as expected, and changes of direction around fallen trunks, but we eventually arrived in the area where we had seen the RHWO fly in.

There were a number of potential nest trees in the clearing so we watched and waited to see the bird return, see which tree it visited before it left again. Was the adult carrying food on the way in? Did it crawl into a nest hole or even just stick its head in? If not, maybe it's another tree; can we find a potential nest hole in any one of those trees?

In this case, we saw the RHWO enter the stub end of limb that had broken off high up in the tree. The stub had been excavated down in from the breakoff point, the tip.

Once we saw evidence of an active nest site, I bushwhacked over to the base of the tree, took a GPS reading and called it out to Bonnie, then tied a shiny purple ribbon around the tree trunk to enable easier spotting next time we're there. Bonnie recorded more data including the tree species, tree status (living, some percent dead, totally dead snag), tree height, cavity height, the direction it faced, description of the understory and then took a photo of the tree.

We labored back to the road and caught up with Val. She had seen an RHWO come in, but it was unclear which tree it was visiting. We all moved back a ways to a side road where we could still see the group of trees. Soon, an RHWO came in to a nearby tree, looked around for a while, then headed right toward a specific tree in the cluster and disappeared into a nest hole just out of our line of sight. Another hit!

Then we went farther north, hiked west again along the edge of a meadow (avoiding the damp slogging through underbrush for a while), then eventually back south to another oak cluster in a clearing. Again, we saw an adult come in, saw it

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enter a nest hole, and repeated our documentation process. We were really getting good at this! Then it was back south to the southern edge of our territory where three black circles awaited us. With a bit of patient watching (actually hearing the peeping of some nestlings waiting for Mom or Dad to return with some breakfast), we successfully marked the remaining three nest trees, although we had run out of purple ribbon, so we'll have to rely on Bonnie's photos next time.

Our score: Six for six! I was pretty impressed. We were all quite pleased. And we're looking forward to seeing those fledglings on our next visit.

Clay Christensen writes the Birdman of Lauderdale column for The St. Anthony Park Bugle and writes the Birdman Blog on their web site, [www.parkbugle.org](http://www.parkbugle.org). This article is reprinted with permission from the Park Bugle.

## Fall Issue Feature Topic

The Fall issue's topic (not done in summer) will be "Can we get RHWO to use nestboxes?" Send your observations and references to Jerry Bahls (rhwracm@comcast.net) by October 15th. Please send observations only - no opinions! Also send any future topics to be featured in the newsletter.

## Next RhWR Meetings

The RhWR usually meets on the 3rd Wednesday each month at 7:00 pm at the Lund's Store 1 block west of 50th & France in Edina. The next meetings will be on **August 17th**. All are welcome and encouraged to attend. Please encourage your friends to attend also. Check our website ([www.RedheadRecovery.org](http://www.RedheadRecovery.org)) for current information.

Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery  
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# Save that Snag!

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## 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 \$10/year! Please send my membership information to the address below.

*I'd like to renew!* Renew my RhWR membership for \$5/year.

*Yes, I'd like to join Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis also!* Please add me as a member of the Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery (\$10) and the Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis (\$12) at the rate of \$22/year. Please send my membership information and *Kingfisher* to the address below.

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

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E-MAIL \_\_\_\_\_

**Send this application and make check payable to:**  
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