



The REDHEAD



Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery

Summer 2013

A Special Committee of the Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis

Vol. 7 No. 3

RHWO NEWS

Return of Red-headed Woodpeckers to Cedar Creek in Spring 2013

Late last summer we were busy watching the red-headed woodpeckers attempting second broods at the Cedar Creek Ecosystem Science Reserve and so were slow to notice what should have been obvious. Most of the birds were gone. The acorn crop was virtually nonexistent and this was likely the primary reason that the birds migrated. The last woodpeckers to leave were the two pairs that raised two broods. While about 120 red-headed Woodpeckers were present during the breeding season, none were at Cedar Creek from early September to May. For months the savannahs, woods, marshes, and fields where redheads had foraged were eerily devoid of the life that the iconic birds had brought to the area.

The first red-headed woodpeckers we saw returned on May 9, 2013. More woodpeckers appeared to be arriving for the next two weeks. On average males returned 4 days earlier than females, but this difference was not statistically significant. Birds breeding for the second time (SY) returned on average 6 days later than older (ASY) birds and this difference was statistically significant.

All the male woodpeckers that returned this spring returned to the same territories as in 2012 or moved just one territory. Of the six females that returned, two returned to the same territory (and the same nest), two moved one territory, one moved three territories, and one moved four territories. (See chart in next column.)

Thus, based on this small sample, it appears that female red-headed woodpeckers are more likely to move a significant distance from their previous year's territory than are males. This is typical of birds. In birds females generally disperse farther than males.

Last year 80% of nests fledged at least one young. Thirteen of seventeen returning birds fledged at least one young, two birds nested and failed to fledge any young, and we did not find a nest for the remaining two. Logically, birds that bred successfully the previous year would be more likely to return to where they bred than birds that failed to breed successfully, but we did not find this. With the return of the woodpeckers, we have our first

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A Note from the Chair

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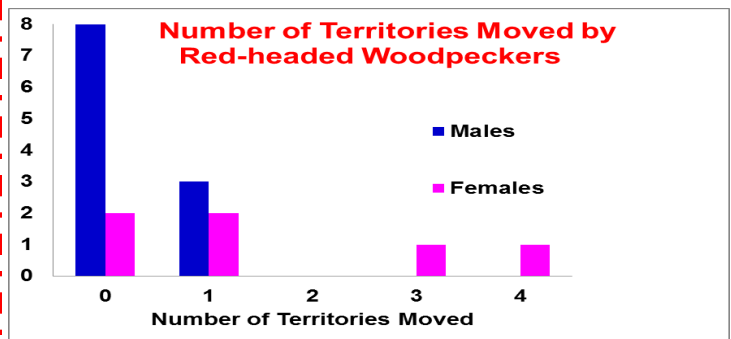
August 2013

With the help of St. Louis Park teachers, Patrick Hartman and Alan Watchuka, we now have data on clutch size (number) and brood success that will form the basis for a scientific paper. The cavity camera use gave a new 'look' into the life of our birds. An example: we have always known that our RHWO nest in small diameter cavities and, from what we could see in terms of fledging, it looked like they were only laying one or two eggs and fledging one young. The camera revealed that the birds are indeed laying clutches of four to five eggs and fledging more young than we expected. We are still pulling together findings and will report more in the next *Redhead*.

Plans are underway to secure funding for next year's project which will expand the work done this year. Outside our research at Cedar Creek, we are excited that Sherburne NWR has begun savanna rehabilitation on the Blue Hill trail where RHWO have nested as recently as 2011. Two of Jack Hauser's experimental RHWO houses have been placed at Nerstrand Big Woods park and will be monitored next year for potential success. Belwin Conservancy could not complete their long-awaited burn of the new savanna restoration lands due to wet spring weather. We did not get to visit Camp Ripley National Guard this year but will do so next year. And we completed our first all species surveys of birds at the Minnesota Valley NWR and habitat in the Louisville Swamp section, which looks like great potential RHWO habitat.

Next year's spring surveys at Cedar Creek will begin a couple of weeks earlier than in the past. With our new nest-cavity camera we need to identify potential nest sites as soon as possible so we can begin monitoring egg-laying activity. Stay tuned. We are at a very exciting stage in our recovery work.

Chet Meyers, Chair



Note From the Editor

The feature topic this month was - "What happens to RHWO's nesting areas when dead trees fall?" But we decided to publish the "Return of Red-headed Woodpeckers to Cedar Creek in Spring 2013" article instead because it was more topical.

Please note the article by Bruce Smisek about his success in attracting RHWO's to his property. Please send us your success stories of attracting them to your place and how you did it.

Finally note the change in our membership dues. June 30th was the deadline for the old fee schedule.

- Jerry Bahls, Editor

Membership Dues Increase

The Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery (RhWR) receives almost all of its revenue from its membership dues. Due to increasing costs associated with our projects, we would like to increase our revenue. The RhWR dues for new members will increase to \$15. 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 increase to \$10/year and will expire on June 30 of the period of renewal. A Lifetime Membership will be awarded for any donation of \$500 or more.

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
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Thank you for your continued support.

Insects Redheads Eat

The photo to the left taken by Siah St. Clair clearly shows the profile of a stag beetle. Siah had taken several pictures of red-headed woodpeckers with insects in their bills that is then fed to their young. Other insects caught by red-headed woodpeckers that Siah has captured in photos are dragonflies and beetles. To see his pictures go to his blog at <http://www.allofnature.blogspot.com/>.

Leaving Iowa City the second day of August I drove through a section of Iowa where the red-headed woodpeckers are probably more numerous than in any other part of their range. During the first part of this trip no dead woodpeckers were seen, while over **100** live birds were recorded. On the last **120** miles of the trip, however, twenty-one dead woodpeckers were observed as well as eighty-two that were alive.

Quote from - Dill, H.R., *Science*, 1926 Jan 15;63(1620):69-70. "IS THE AUTOMOBILE EXTERMINATING THE WOODPECKER?"



Photo by Siah St. Clair

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Photo by Bruce Smisek

Feeder Success

Hello my name is Bruce Smisek and I have loved nature all of my life. About 15 years ago I started feeding the birds and fell in love with it. I continue to feed the birds today and will until I can no longer do so. I live in LeSueur County with my lovely wife Sheila. Together we have raised three boys. We live in a small town called Montgomery which is about 45 miles south from Minneapolis, MN.

I have a remote feeding station that has some open areas of grass and a field surrounded by old growth woods. There is also an abandoned railroad line on the property. I also have a feeding station in the woods that I use during the winter time. A person could not use it during the summer for the bugs would eat you alive. At this feeding station I have a recliner to sit and watch the birds. Every time it is mentioned, my family gets a good laugh out of it. They can laugh all they want but I am comfortable when I watch at that station.

Back to the other feeding station, I am so lucky to have a pair of Redheaded Woodpeckers that visit me every year. Their nest is over by the old railroad line for they fly from that direction every time. It has been 5 years and every year they have raised young in which they bring to the feeders. It is just a delight to see them every year. There is also downy, hairy and red bellied woodpeckers that come to my station.

How do I get them to stay and feed at my station? I have found out through trial and error that they like peanuts the best, however an ear of corn on a nail seems to work too. I do have other feeders at this station. They consist of a platform feeder, suet feeder, finch feeder and a fruit feeder. The platform feeder also seems to be the choice when it comes to the Redheaded Woodpeckers. The redheaded woodpeckers are very aggressive when it comes to their feeding. They will chase the other birds away. They like the place to themselves.

I am writing this on April 18, 2013 and it's snowing outside. The winter of 2013 doesn't seem to quit. I am hoping that my pair of woodpeckers return this year. We also have been taking photos of the birds for 3 years now. We have photos of many species. I hope that you are as lucky as me to be able to witness a pair of redheaded woodpeckers and I can't wait for them to return again this year.

I would love to share my little friends with you. Just contact me at 507-364-8966 which is our business line. If there is no answer please leave a message.

The Recliner Bird Man,
Bruce Smisek

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opportunity to estimate the birds' annual survival. The red-headed woodpecker account in *Birds of North America* cites a survival rate of 62%. We had color banded fifty adults in 2012. Using this value, I estimated that 28 color banded birds would return this spring. Only 17 color banded birds returned. That would yield a very poor survival rate of 34%.

Of the 50 color banded birds last year, we saw 33 in July or August. We found two of the birds dead along Anoka County Road 26 and were certain that several others had died during the breeding season. So we had about 33 color banded birds that migrated elsewhere in late summer. Of these 15 returned in spring 2013. This would be a survival rate of 45% for about 11 months.

Only two pairs where both birds were color banded returned. These nested in the same holes as in 2012. Several other pairs likely returned, but at least one of the birds was unbanded and so we could not be certain. Of the 17 color banded birds that returned in 2013, two of the birds were a surprise. These were birds caught early in the breeding season and which we did not find at a nest or with a mate in 2012. We may just have not noticed them, or they may have gone elsewhere during the breeding season.

In 2012 there were about 60 pairs at Cedar Creek. In 2013 we know of only 32 pairs. What could account for the nearly 50% decrease in the number of breeding woodpeckers? Presumably, migration holds hazards that remaining on the breeding grounds does not. So some additional mortality would be expected. It could well be that some of the color banded birds are alive and well elsewhere. I am hopeful that a couple will show up at Cedar Creek later this year or next year.

Most of the decrease in numbers of breeding pairs occurred in the area near Fish Lake. Last year 18 pairs nested there. This year only five pairs are nesting there. This was the region of greatest nest density. It is curious that birds were more likely to return to the less densely populated areas than the most densely populated areas.

In 2012 of the fifty color banded birds, ten were second year birds (birds in their first breeding season). So far in 2013, only two of sixteen birds we have banded are second year birds. So last year about one-fifth of the population were "new" birds, but this year very few birds are "new". The number of nests at Cedar Creek increased from about 42 in 2011 to 50 in 2012. The extra 16 birds could have been older (ASY) birds from elsewhere or (more likely) SY birds hatched at Cedar Creek or from distant nests. If only one-fifth of the birds were SY, some ASY birds must have moved to Cedar Creek from elsewhere. This year the many unbanded birds are nearly all ASY birds. Presumably, all or nearly all of these were present last year and were among the approximately 70 birds that did not get banded. A major factor in the decrease in population this

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year appears to be a minimal recruitment of SY birds.

We are still busy monitoring the active nests and trying to count the number of fledglings produced by the birds. In past years we have only rarely found that a pair succeeds in fledging more than two young. Production of just one or two young per pair may not be enough to sustain the population. We hope this summer to find broods of three or even four young.

We hope to be able to continue collecting data on the birds this fall and winter. Some of the birds are likely to spend the winter at Cedar Creek and others leave. This will be the first year when we will be in a position to compare characteristics of birds that migrate from the area with those that remain all year.

Jim Howitz

Fall Issue Feature Topic

The Fall issue's topic will be - "What happens to RHWO's nesting areas when dead trees fall?" Send your observations and references to Jerry Bahls (rhwracm@comcast.net) by October 15th. 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. However, the next meetings will be on August 28th. All are welcome and encouraged to attend. Please encourage your friends to attend also. Check our website (www.RedheadRecovery.org) for current information.

Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery
Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis
PO Box 3801
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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 \$15/year! Please send my membership information to the address below.

I'd like to renew! Renew my RhWR membership for \$10/year.

Yes, I'd like to join Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis also! Please add me as a member of the Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery (\$15) and the Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis (\$12) at the rate of \$27/year. Please send my membership information and *Kingfisher* to the address below.

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