



Jim Williams

The REDHEAD



Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery

Winter 2013

A Special Committee of the Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis

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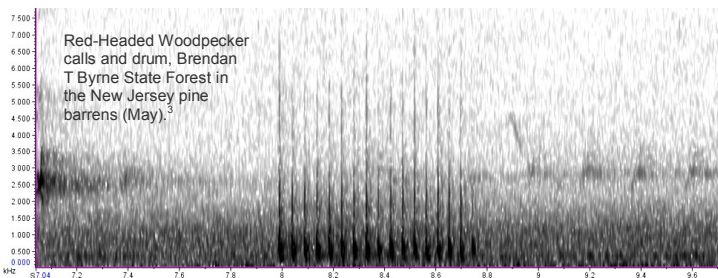
RHWO NEWS

Endangered, Threatened and Special Concern Species Lists

This list is composed of the rarest species in the state. It contains both animals and plants. Most conservation efforts by the DNR and other agencies are directed toward preserving these species and their habitats. To give a couple of examples of the rarity of these species, during the last 25 years, there was no record of breeding activity for either the sprague's pipit or burrowing owls. This list is currently being updated. To see the proposed changes, go to <http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/ets/rulesrevision.htm> "Proposed_Changes_to_special_co..." Under birds, notice that all is not bleak: the Henslow's sparrow, trumpeter swan, peregrine falcon and bald eagle are all being downgraded to a lesser degree of endangerment.

The Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery is proposing to also include the red-headed woodpecker on this list as a **Special Concern** species. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources will hold public hearings on the above and continuing until the hearings are completed. The last scheduled hearing is on Thursday, February 7, 2013, at Best Western Plus Kelly Inn, 2705 North Annapolis Lane, Plymouth, Minnesota 55441. All interested or affected persons will have an opportunity to participate by submitting either oral or written data, statements, or arguments. Statements may be submitted without appearing at the hearing. Submit written comments to the administrative law judge at rulecomments@state.mn.us.

Please send your comments as soon as possible, since the closing period is unknown and may be as early as the last public hearing date. The contact person for questions is Richard Baker at Division of Ecological and Water Resources, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources 500 Lafayette Road, St. Paul, Minnesota 55155-4025, 651-259-5073, and richard.baker@state.mn.us.



Red-Headed Woodpecker calls and drum, Brendan T Byrne State Forest in the New Jersey pine barrens (May).³

A Note from the Chair

A Note from the Chair

February 2013

Chet is on vacation, so only a few comments.

We received some bad news concerning our application for funding from the FWS. We were tuned down because "another project has been funded that will produce more applicable planning information with data collected across a much larger area and in two primary forest types."

We still could use a few more surveyors for this spring at Cedar Creek. If you can help, please contact Chet at chetmeyers@visi.com or 612 374-5581.



Photo by Chris Hettig

Jerry Bahls for Chet Meyers, Chair

Red-headed Woodpecker Communications Techniques

The Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology's *All About Birds* website¹ states that "Red-headed Woodpeckers give all kinds of chirps, cackles, and other raucous calls. Their most common call is a shrill, hoarse *tchur*, like a Red-bellied Woodpecker's but higher-pitched and less rolling. When chasing each other they make shrill *charr-charr* notes." In addition to their *tchur* they also have two alarm calls and drum. Again *All About Birds* states that the "Red-headed Woodpeckers drum on trees, utility poles, tin roofs,

(Continued on page 2, Drumming)

Note From the Editor

The feature topic this month is - “How do RHWOs communicate?” The Cornell Lab of Ornithology website has some very good pages that describe the various communication methods used by birds. Check it out. I left out a reference to a recording of a RHWO in distress. It was very disturbing.

Jim Howitz’s article is a great example of solving a problem by studying the behavior of a target species and making adjustments to accomplish your goal. Being able to capture 50 red-headed woodpeckers was an extraordinary feat worthy of publication for all to learn from his experience.

- Jerry Bahls, Editor

Drumming (Continued from page 1)

stovepipes, or the sides of houses to drive away territorial intruders. Drumming includes a two-part hammering sound, as well as a staccato roll somewhat like that of a Downy Woodpecker (with one-second bursts of 19–25 beats per second, repeated 2–3 times). They also tap slowly on surfaces near the nest cavity when choosing a nest or communicating with their mates.”

Most of the communications that birds use are related to mating. They’re trying to attract a mate and use courtship songs or in the case of woodpeckers – drumming. They use a territorial call or drumming to defend a territory after a mate has been selected. Also they use a contact call to just stay in touch when feeding or flying and often use a softer call when in close contact. The red-headed woodpecker (RHWO) uses a “gentle, dry rattle: *krrrrr*.”² Alert calls are also used. Begging calls by young sometime gives away a nest location.

Researchers and more often now amateur bird lovers use sonograms like the one on page 1 to study what calls mean. Modern digital audio technology has made this possible. The sonogram³ shown is of a RHWO drumming followed by a call.

1. http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Red-headed_Woodpecker/sounds
2. <http://birds.cornell.edu/bfl/speciesaccts/rehwoo.html>
3. <http://pjdeye.blogspot.com/2009/04/woodpeckers-ii-non-vocal-sounds.html>

Trials and Tribulations of Banding Red-headed Woodpeckers

By Jim Howitz

I have been color banding Black-capped Chickadees at Cedar Creek Ecosystem Science Reserve (CCESR) since 1976, so I was the logical choice for the Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery (RhWR) to prevail upon to color band Red-headed Woodpeckers at CCESR. Ari Waldstein, a University of Minnesota graduate student who had done her master’s thesis on the woodpeckers, had color banded one Red-headed Woodpecker there, so we knew that it was possible.

I had several feeding platforms in the areas where the woodpeckers nested and over the years I had seen the woodpeckers use them many times. I even had them use the “portable” feeder I carry around with me (see picture). But I never had a Red-headed Woodpecker enter one of my traps. (I use a McCamey trap and a pull string to catch chickadees.) Red-bellied Woodpeckers also used my feeders, but never went into a trap. They would use their long tongues to extract seeds from the sides of the trap. I was concerned that the Red-headed Woodpeckers would do likewise.

My experience with chickadees was that they would come to a feeder from hundreds of yards away. I had 75 different chickadees visit one feeder in 1979. I was hopeful that we could attract several Red-headed Woodpeckers to each feeder. This was not to be.

Lance Nelson (a RhWR volunteer) and I began putting out seeds at the existing feeders to get the woodpeckers accustomed to them. Only three of nine feeding platforms were used by Red-headed Woodpeckers. Still we decided to try to catch some woodpeckers.

On February 17, 2012, Ron Refsnider (a permitted bird bander), Lance, and I set out Ron’s new trap, and a Red-headed Woodpecker entered it and stepped on the treadle, closing the door. We were elated, but I was extremely anxious that I would screw up and not get the bands on or worse yet let the bird escape. All went well and we had doubled the number of banded woodpeckers at CCESR (from one to two). Mary Spivey, CCESR Education

(Continued on page 3, Banding Success)

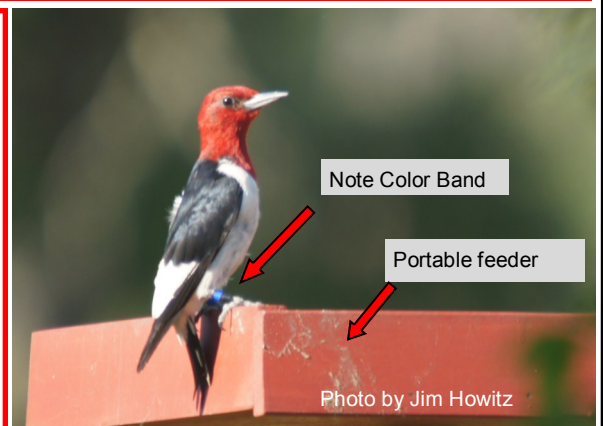
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Banding Success (continued from page 2)

Coordinator, joined us and we went to the feeder used by "Eve", the female woodpecker Ari had color banded. We quickly caught her unbanded mate "Adam" (Who else?) and we purposely avoided catching her. This was going to be easy.

We went to the third feeder to try to catch the woodpecker that had been using it, on which I had put seeds that morning, but the bird had taken all it wanted and would not visit the trap. Well, we thought we had a pretty good start.

We did not try to catch any woodpeckers until March 13, because they just were not using the feeders. Lance, Ron, Mary, and I tried to catch the bird we had missed on the previous occasion. After half an hour or so, the bird finally went into the trap. I was ecstatic because we had at least something to show for almost a month of effort. Then weeks went by with nothing accomplished. We set out black oil sunflower seeds, sunflower hearts, peanuts, macadamia nuts, and mealworms with no success.

What we did not realize was that the birds were on territory and a bird would not leave its territory even if it could see a feeder within 100 feet of its roost hole.

We grew frustrated with trapping and when the weather warmed enough, we tried to mist net the birds. Ron did the hard work. He supplied the net, the poles, the guy wires, the sound equipment and recordings of Red-headed Woodpecker calls and drummings. I brought a plastic Red-headed Woodpecker dummy.

On April 6, we first tried a net location where we thought that the birds would have trouble seeing the net, and played the recordings. That did not work. Next we put the net right next to a roost hole and played the recordings. The recordings riled up a couple of woodpeckers. They grappled with one another and one got caught in the net. (Yea!) We moved the net to an area that had just been burned. The black net was hard to see against the blackened ground and we caught another bird in the net.

Over the next four weeks, Ron, Lance, and I continued to try to net Red-headed Woodpeckers. We were joined by Paige Dempsey, a junior at Breck School who assisted in the research. We would set up the net in what we thought would be a likely spot and play the recordings. This would invariably attract the resident pair and often birds from the adjacent territories. We never caught more than two woodpeckers at one spot. The neighbors would join the hubbub created by the playbacks and the resident birds, but never hit the net. We could easily see where the territory boundaries were. The birds were reluctant to venture from their territories. Sometimes moving the net just 100 feet was enough to lure in a bird. We netted in open savannah where the net was quite visible, but we still managed to net woodpeckers even with sunny and windy conditions.

Meanwhile, the woodpeckers had begun using the dozen or so new feeders I had set out. I would try to put a feeder close to the nest hole. In one case, neither of the pair was using a feeder on their territory. So I moved it within 40 feet of their nest and caught both of them the next day.

When flying insects became common, the woodpeckers spent much of their time flycatching, and trapping became more difficult.

Luck always played a role in our efforts. I was sort of jinxed. As soon as I would start to leave a net or trap to do something else, a bird would get caught.

When we stopped banding in July, we had banded 25 birds caught in a net and 25 caught in a trap. We applied three plastic color bands and a USGS Bird Banding Laboratory numbered metal band to each bird. This enabled us to uniquely identify each bird. The birds quickly adjusted to wearing the bands and by July we had ten pairs of banded birds that readily came to a feeder as soon as we would show up with something for them to eat.

We were remarkably specific in catching only Red-headed Woodpeckers. We netted only one other bird, a chickadee, and besides the Red-headed Woodpeckers, we trapped just a few chickadees, nuthatches, and jays.

The Potter-type trap we used would catch any bird that stepped on the treadle. When one of a pair of woodpeckers was banded and the other unbanded, I would use my trusty pull-string chickadee trap. The banded woodpecker could go in and out of the trap without getting caught, as could the chickadees and nuthatches that were very fond of the peanuts and macadamia nuts we used. However, when the unbanded woodpecker would venture into the trap, my eyes would get as big as saucers, and I would yank the string, neatly trapping the bird.

Once we had a few birds banded, we got to know several of them quite well. Eve's mate Adam was found dead along



(Continued on page 4, Adam)

Adam (continued from page 3)

Anoka County Road 26 on June 2, evidently killed in a vehicle collision. Two days later, Lance and I went to Eve's nest. An unbanded male was calling there, and he copulated with her. Apparently, she abandoned her first nesting attempt (presumably fathered by Adam) and laid another clutch in the same nest cavity (presumably fathered by this new male who we banded on June 13). However, by July 18, Eve had yet another mate (unbanded) and the second nesting attempt failed. The ease with which Eve replaced two mates suggests that there may be an excess of males in the population or that she is some sort of femme fatale.

Our ability to recognize individuals now has opened a new chapter in the CCESR Red-headed Woodpecker story. We are anxiously awaiting their return (all left CCESR in August 2012) from what we presume are warmer climes with more acorns. Who knows what tales we will have to tell about 2013?

Spring Issue Feature Topic

The Spring issue's topic will be - "The red-headed woodpecker in art and literature." Send your observations and references to Jerry Bahls (rhwracm@comcast.net) by April 15th. Also send any future topics to be featured in the newsletter.

Next RhWR Meetings

The RhWR 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 February 20 and March 27, 2013. 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
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Minneapolis MN 55403-0801

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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.

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