



The REDHEAD



Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery

Winter 2009

A Special Committee of the Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis

Vol. 3 No. 1

Note From the Editor

This issue features a couple of articles, the first one is a continuation of guidelines for property owners. Last issue dealt with more urban settings and this issue deals with small to medium wood lots.

The second article deals with a suspected competitor of the redheaded woodpecker (RHWO) - the starling. It is an article from Canada, but provides good information about starlings. It includes a method that has been successful in removing them from an area. Unfortunately it does require the euthanization of those that are caught.



Photo by Doug Kincaid

While it has been suspected that the starling is a competitor, it has not been proven. The primary source of competition is for nest holes. Starlings are very aggressive and will take over any potential nesting site. The question is do they nest far enough apart in the Spring to minimize the competition for the nest sites? Does having a starling nesting in the same or

nearby tree intimidate the RHWO? It would be great to know the answers to these questions. I am working on a proposal to answer these questions, at least for woodpeckers as a general class. Watch for other developments on this front.

- The Editor

A Note from the Chair

Spring is indeed in the air. At least that's what the returning horned larks tell us. And Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery is gearing up for another year of surveys at Cedar Creek and a renewed focus on finding red-headed woodpecker (RHWO) clusters throughout the state. We have 'number-crunched' some of the data from last year's work at Cedar Creek, which proved very valuable. That data demonstrated that small clusters of large living and dead oak trees, surrounded by an open understory, were important to successful RHWO nesting. All 18 nest trees were found in oak savanna habitat composed of bur, northern pin, or northern red oaks. Much of our data was consistent with the research from Necedah NWR, and will help our project and the Minnesota DNR create guidelines for public and private landowners so that existing savanna habitat can be preserved and new habitat created.

In addition to our work at Cedar Creek Ecosystem Science Reserve, this year we will be focusing on locating other concentrations (what we call *clusters*) of RHWO throughout the state. We define a *cluster* as two or more nesting pairs within a 1/4 mile radius. With oak savanna as the RHWO's preferred habitat, the bad news is that oak savanna is presently one of the rarest ecological biomes in the state. The good news is that from a bird's-eye view, flying aloft, golf courses look pretty much like savanna, with large open spaces and a few clumps of trees. Here is where we can really use the help of Minnesota birders who frequent golf courses.

We have already identified two golf courses with viable clusters of RHWO present and will work with the superintendents of golf courses to ensure that the habitat remains conducive to RHWO nesting. But, with are over 450 golf courses in Minnesota, we need your help. The best time to locate clusters is in late May or early June when adults are actively feeding young. We particularly need help in the far southwest section of Minnesota where there are a large number of RHWO sightings each year, and also a large number of golf courses. The question is, do the two go together? You can help by reporting sightings of *groups* of RHWO to Mary Miller at <Marygracm@aol.com>. Please give the name of the golf course, county and nearest town. For more information please visit <www.RedheadRecovery.org>

- Chet Meyers

Website

The Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery website address (www.RedheadRecovery.org) was down due to an oversight on our part. The problem has been fixed. If this happens again you can always reach our website at <http://rhrp.moumn.org>, which is the website server address. RedheadRecovery.org is our registered domain name. We apologize if this caused any inconvenience.

Membership Dues

The Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery (RhWR) receives almost all of its revenue from its membership dues. The RhWR will increase its dues for new memberships immediately. The dues will increase to \$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 READHEAD". Because we have decided to establish our membership year as July 1 - June 30 (all memberships will expire on June 30 of the year the membership was established), all new memberships established from now until June 30, 2010 will expire on June 30, 2010. Renewals will remain at \$5/year, but 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.

Editor's note: The following article is reprinted from part of an article from the Missouri Department of Conservation's entitled "Woodland Management" at <http://www.missouriconservation.org/>. Copyright © Missouri Conservation Commission. All rights reserved.

Protecting snags and den trees

A snag is a standing dead tree. Den trees are live trees with a natural hollow in the trunk or limbs. Both are essential habitat for many kinds of woodland wildlife.

Once a tree dies, the slow process of decay begins. As the heartwood in a snag softens, woodpeckers excavate nest holes, which are later used by other wildlife.

Many birds, mammals and reptiles use tree cavities throughout the year for nesting, feeding, perching, escape cover and protection from the weather. Fewer or no den trees usually means less wildlife in an area.

In a typical woodlot, trees with cavities are often in short supply, so it is important to protect both existing and potential den trees. Old, open-grown, large-crowned trees should be protected because they are likely to become good den trees. They also produce nuts, seeds and fruits, making them doubly valuable for wildlife.

White oak, post oak and other members of the long-lived white oak group make the best den trees, but black or red oak, hickory, American elm, sugar maple, American sycamore, eastern cottonwood, black gum, ash and basswood also are excellent.

As a general rule, seven snags or living den trees per acre provide an adequate number of cavities. Live den trees will last longer and are often fruit or nut producers. Standing dead trees attract insects and do not compete with other trees for water, nutrients and sunlight. Consider the option of deadening undesirable trees but not removing them.

A woodland management plan for wildlife should include the following practices for protecting snags and den trees within a woodlot:

- Leave at least one snag and one den tree larger than 20 inches at DBH for every acre of woodlot.
- Leave at least four snags ranging between 10 and 20 inches at DBH per acre.

Leave at least two snags and two den trees ranging

- between 6 and 10 inches at DBH.

Preserving existing snags and den trees, as

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Articles Wanted

The editor would like articles for "The RED-HEAD" sent to RhWRACM@comcast.net. Articles may be edited for clarity and size.

RHWO Candy?

What is candy to a red-headed woodpecker (RHWO)? One of the goals of the RhWR is to provide a list of RHWO preferred foods to our membership. To assist us in this, we are asking members who have RHWO's regularly coming to their feeders to let us know what they are eating. We would like you to feed one type of food at a time - no mixes. You may put more than one in the feeder at a time but keep them separated and know what is where. This is a list of suggested foods - peanuts (roasted or raw, in-shell or splits), black oil sunflower, striped sunflower, corn (whole or cracked), raisins (or other dried fruit), pecans, almonds or other seeds or nuts that you think they might like. If you would like to participate, send a message to RhWRACM@comcast.net.

RhWR Contact Information

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Editor's note: "The source of the materials is <http://www.agriculture.alberta.ca>. The use of these materials by the Redheaded Woodpecker Recovery is done without any affiliation with or endorsement by the Government of Alberta. Reliance upon Redheaded Woodpecker Recovery's use of these materials is at the risk of the end user." This article relates to livestock, but is equally relevant to any area of human habitation. More information may be obtained from the website cited above. Starlings are believed to be a competing species.

Starlings and their Control

Starlings were first introduced from Europe to North America in the late 1890's as an attractive songbird that would enhance the natural beauty of the new world landscape and remind immigrants of the old country. Since that time, they have greatly increased in number and have spread across most of the North American continent.

Description and Behavior

Adult starlings are chunky birds, about the size of robins. In summer, their plumage is glossy purple-green with numerous white markings; the bill is yellow. During the winter, the back feathers are much darker and edged in light brown. The bill also darkens to bluish-black. The color is identical for both sexes. The starling's most prominent feature is an unusually short tail.

Favorite foods include fruits and seeds, both wild and cultivated. Insects and other invertebrates make up about half the diet, especially during the spring breeding season. During the fall months, starlings tend to vacate the harsh northern climate of Alberta and travel south [Editor: In Minnesota, they do not migrate]. Consequently, wintering flocks often concentrate in great numbers at feedlots and livestock shelters.

Starlings nest in holes or cavities almost anywhere, including trees, birdhouses, buildings or rock piles. Females lay 4 to 7 eggs, which hatch after 11 to 13 days of incubation. Young birds leave the nest when they are about three weeks old. Both parents build the nest and care for the eggs and hatchlings. Two broods each season are not uncommon.

Damage

In Alberta, starlings can be a nuisance to livestock producers. They consume and contaminate livestock feed and water. They also "whitewash" buildings, facilities and animals with their droppings. In winter, flocks of up to 2,000 birds can consume 1 to 2 tonnes of feed in a month and can contaminate or spoil an additional 500 to 1,000 kg of feed. Worse still, starlings may selectively eat the high-protein portion of protein-supplemented livestock feed.

Starlings can also transfer many diseases between livestock animals, particularly swine.

Control of Damage

Starlings are attracted to livestock operations by available food, water and shelter for nesting and roosting. Prevention can dramatically reduce or eliminate problems with starlings.

Exclusion in sheltered areas

1. where starlings are a problem inside buildings, close all openings with a diameter larger than 2.5 cm (1 inch)
2. suspend clear heavy plastic strips 25 cm (10 inches) wide from open doorways where continuous traffic prevents the use of doors. The strips should be placed 5 cm (2 inches) apart and should nearly touch the ground.
3. eliminate roosting areas by placing boards at 45° over ledges.

Integrated Pest Management

Using a variety of different techniques at the same time gives the best results. Reliance upon one technique will often fall short, since starlings soon learn to avoid specific areas or devices.

Removal with Traps

Trapping and removing starlings can be successful at locations where the birds are a year-round problem, where they are few in number or where other techniques are ineffective or cannot be used.

Food-baited funnel traps are designed to capture starlings alive. A pre-bait offer of grain or other food placed outside but near the trap for four to six days will condition the birds to the trap.

After a week, place the bait inside the trap with a supply of water. Funnel traps work best in feedlots, livestock shelters or grain storage areas. Place traps in an open area at least three metres from farm buildings or areas of human activity.

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well as protecting potential den trees, helps the woodlot become a productive wildlife area for many years to come.

Den trees and snags can be created by wounding selected trees. Open wounds allow fungi to enter the tree and begin the decay process. It may take several years for trees to develop cavities. This process can be hastened through the following techniques:

- Cut a limb (the larger the better) about 6 inches from the trunk of the tree. Ash, elm, cottonwood, sycamore, silver maple and basswood are especially prone to develop natural cavities from cuts.
- Chop a section of bark from the trunk of a suitable tree, preferably one that already shows signs of damage or decay. Select trees at about 100-foot intervals.

Drill a hole, at least 2 inches in diameter and 3 inches deep, into the trunk of a tree. If possible, make the hole under a limb that is 3 inches or more in diameter. [Editor: Many nest holes for RHWO are in such a limb.] For more immediate results, put up bird houses and den boxes.

Next RhWR Meeting

The RhWR usually meets on the 2nd Wednesday each month at (7:00 pm) at the Lund's Store 1 block west of 50th & France in Edina. However, the next meeting will be on **March 25, 2009**, because of the room availability. All are welcomed and encouraged to attend. Check our website for current information.

Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery
Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis
PO Box 3801
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Save that Snag!

Place
Stamp
Here



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 and the Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis at the rate of \$18/year. Please send my membership information and *Kingfisher* to the address below.

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

E-MAIL _____

Send this application and make check payable to:
Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis
RhWR
PO Box 3801
Minneapolis, MN 55403-0801