



# The REDHEAD



## Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery

Winter 2011

A Special Committee of the Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis

Vol. 5 No. 1

### Note From the Editor

In this issue we will be exploring the topic "Where do Minnesota red-headed woodpeckers go in the winter?"

A summary of the historical reports of the red-headed woodpecker is given to put the current situation into perspective. Another article gives a more countrywide view of the current migratory status. It is followed by a more regional summary of the migration pattern of the RHW. A review, *Where are the Winter Hot Spots for Red-headed Woodpeckers*, of the CBC data shows the areas where one might find "our" birds in the winter. We hope you find these interesting and encourage you to do further reading of the references cited.

Next issue the topic will be "Will the spread of the emerald ash borer help the RHW recovery?" This should be an interesting topic and one where we may be able to have an influence in how the dead and dying ash trees may be managed. It is hoped that a management policy for managing ash trees will be published in this, the Spring issue. In the past, red-headed woodpeckers have recovered during the die off mature trees. The chestnut and elm die offs are two good examples of this. Please send us your thoughts on how the ash trees should be managed, especially the dying ones, since they represent the most difficult case.

Please send your observations or potential articles on any subject related to red-headed woodpeckers to the Editor. The deadline for the Spring issue is April 15th.

Jerry Bahls, Editor



### A Note from the Chair

It's hard to believe we are beginning our fifth year as a project of the Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis. This year we continue our fourth year of research studies at Cedar Creek Ecosystem Science Preserve. We now have a solid base of nesting data that is helping us better understand what it takes to maintain good oak savanna habitat for RHW. The presence of our new intern, Ari Goldstein, at Cedar Creek frees the rest of us up to do more exploring in central and southern Minnesota.

This is where we still need your help. We want to identify as many healthy *clusters* of RHW as we can, and then work with landowners to preserve and enhance that habitat. So, if you are aware of any groups of three or more pairs of RHW in a rather delimited area (1/4 mile radius), please get in touch and give us the details. We added two new clusters this year at Camp Ripley, bringing our statewide total to eight.

#### Verified clusters of RHW in Minnesota:

Cedar Creek (East Bethel)	25 pairs
Rutger's Bay Lake Golf Course (Deerwood)	4 pairs
Blackberry Hills Golf Course (Sartell)	8 pairs
Nerstrand Big Woods State Park	3-4 pairs
Private land (south of Onamia)	4-6 pairs
Manhattan Beach Peninsula	4-6 pairs
Camp Ripley National Guard	2 clusters 20+ pairs

We particularly need the help of golfer/birders, as golf courses are proving fruitful hunting grounds. With over 400 golf courses in Minnesota, our best 'finds' the past two years have been in the Brainerd and Mille Lacs areas. We believe there may be as many as another half dozen courses that presently support RHW populations.

Chet Meyers

#### Did you know?

The Red-headed Woodpecker is found in all parts of the United States. Its flesh is tough, and smells strongly of ants and other insects, so as to be scarcely eatable.

- John James Audubon

## Historical Migration

The red-headed woodpecker's migration during the period before and during the early European settlement was influenced by hard mast crop abundance<sup>1</sup>. A favorite food at that time was the beech nut. This resulted in their migration to the large tracts of beech trees<sup>1</sup> in the eastern US<sup>2</sup> where there were vast forests of beech trees. However during the European settlement these forests were cut and turned into farmland. By the early 1900's this source of food was largely gone.

This abundance of food resulted in the migration of the red-headed woodpecker (RHWO) to these beech forests<sup>1</sup>, regardless of where they had been during the breeding season. RHWO's from Wisconsin, Michigan and Canada would move south to these forests. RHWO's from the upper plains, Minnesota, Iowa and Illinois would often move east to these forests. RHWO's from the east would move west and sometime even southern birds would move north to take advantage of the abundance of beech nuts.

Acorns were also a food source that influenced their movement or non-movement and still is to this day<sup>1</sup>. The oak savannah's were not only their breeding residences, but also would be their non-breeding residences and would attract RHWO from areas where the mast production was low for that year.

<sup>1</sup> K. G. Smith, J. H. Withgott & P. G. Rodewald, *The birds of North America*, 518, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.na.fs.fed.us/spfo/pubs/silvics\\_manual/volume\\_2/fagus/grandifolia.htm](http://www.na.fs.fed.us/spfo/pubs/silvics_manual/volume_2/fagus/grandifolia.htm)

### *Did you know?*

During the late 1700s and 1800s, the red-headed woodpecker was a common and widespread species in the Northeast. In the late 1800s, large concentrations of these birds were observed during fall migration in New York and Long Island. Now they are considered to be an uncommon migrant there. Today, only a handful of migrants are observed during migration in Cape May.

- Conserve Wildlife Foundation(CWF) of New Jersey

## Where are the Winter Hot Spots for Red-headed Woodpeckers

In reviewing the five highest counts of red-headed woodpeckers (RHWO) in the Christmas Bird Count (CBC) across the country for the last five years, we get a sense of where they go for the winter. The five highest counts were:

2006	2007
Spavinaw, OK - 365	Union County, IL - 256
Union County, IL - 220	Lamoni, IA - 150
Horseshoe Lake, IL - 158	Horseshoe Lake, IL - 133
Tulsa, OK - 157	White River NWR, AR - 80
Mingo NWR, MO - 130	Millersburg, OH - 79
2008	2009
Linn County, KS - 404	Horton-Four Rivers, MO - 230
Union County, IL - 169	Swan Lake NWR, MO - 173
Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge, OK - 147	Jackson County, IL - 133
Pere Marquette Park, IL - 112	St. Tammany Parish, LA - 108
Clarence Cannon NWR, MO - 109	Union County, IL - 107
2010	From these locations and counts it can be seen that these locations nearly all fall in the map below in the red areas (spots within the largest inner "circle").
Linn County, KS - 202	
Mingo NWR, MO - 146	
Knob Noster, MO - 140	
Horton-Four Rivers, MO - 128	
Cypress Creek, IL - 92	

Since there is no data available on where these RHWO come from, one can speculate they come from the west and north. Some possibly as far away as Minnesota and Wisconsin. It is likely that many birds from Minnesota and Wisconsin will winter in Iowa and northern Missouri.

It is interesting to note that Millersburg, OH is the furthest east and St. Tammany Parish, LA (near Lake Pontchartrain) is the only far south location. Lamoni, IA (just north of the Missouri border) is the farthest north location. Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge, OK (SW of Oklahoma City) is the furthest west.

## RhWR Contact Information

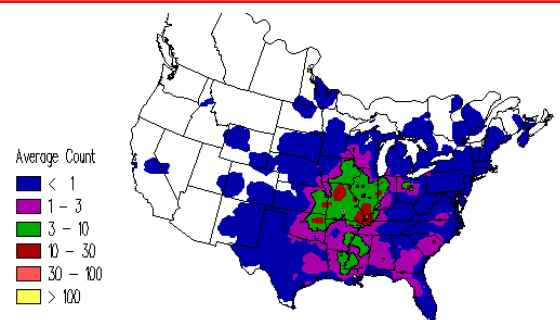
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## Map of winter distribution from CBC



Source: <http://137.227.242.23/bbs/cbcra/h4060ra.html>

## Current Migration

The red-headed woodpecker (RHWO) often leaves northern and western portions of its range in the fall<sup>1</sup>. This is largely influenced by the abundance or shortage of hard mast<sup>2</sup>. Consequently birds may linger in the north and west in some years and in others move east and south<sup>3</sup>. Analysis of high counts on Christmas Bird Counts suggests that fall migration patterns is generally from west to east for those leaving northern breeding areas<sup>3</sup>, for example, 284 RHWO were counted flying east through St. Louis in one hour on September 15, 1884<sup>5</sup>. They may also not migrate at all when there is an abundance of mast in their breeding areas<sup>3</sup>. Some southern populations reportedly move north in the fall<sup>4</sup>.

It has been suggested that RHWO's migrate diurnally in the fall and nocturnally in the spring<sup>5,6,7</sup>. This would be consistent with the wondering nature while it looks for food. Whereas the nocturnal spring migration would be consistent with the need to get back to defend its breeding territory. It is difficult to distinguish the timing of the return in spring because of difficulty of identifying migrant birds from those that remained in the breeding area<sup>6</sup>.

Generally they begin leaving the northern breeding areas by the latter part of August with migration peaking in mid-September, and ending in mid-October to early November<sup>1</sup>. They are known to follow large rivers south<sup>8</sup> in the fall along with bluejays<sup>9</sup>. Small flocks in fall suggests they move as family units<sup>10</sup>, but it is generally thought that adults precede juveniles<sup>6</sup>. In the spring they are rarely seen suggesting a nocturnal migration<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> K. G. Smith, J. H. Withgott & P. G. Rodewald, *The birds of North America*, 518, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> J. L. Zimmerman, *The birds of Konza*, Univ. Press of Kansas, Lawrence, 1993.

<sup>3</sup> K. G. Smith, *Winter dynamics of three species of mast-eating birds in the eastern US*, *Wilson Bull.*, 407—418, 98, 1986b.

<sup>4</sup> H. M. Stevenson & B. H. Anderson, *The birdlife of Florida*, Univ. Press of Florida, Gainesville, 1994.

<sup>5</sup> O. Widmann, *A preliminary catalog of the birds of Missouri*, *Trans. Acad. Sci.*, St. Louis, MO, 1907.

<sup>6</sup> J. W. Graber & R. R. Graber, *Illinois Birds: Picidae*, *Ill. Nat. Hist. Surv. Biol. Notes* no. 102, 1977.

<sup>7</sup> W. Zimmerman, *The Birds of Illinois*, Indiana Univ. Press, Bloomington, 1989.

<sup>8</sup> M. B. Robbins & D. A. Easterla, *Birds of Missouri: their distribution and abundance*, Univ. of Missouri Press, Columbia, 1992.

<sup>9</sup> H. D. Bohlen, *The birds of Illinois*, Indiana Univ. Press, Bloomington, 1989.

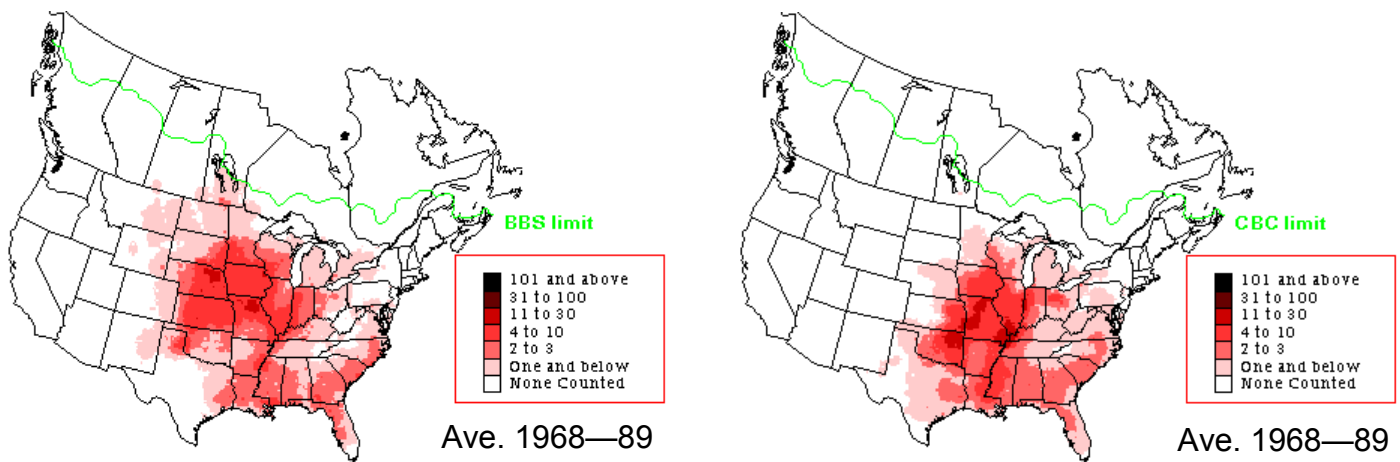
<sup>10</sup> G. A. Hall, *West Virginia birds*, *Spec. Publ. Carnegie Mus. Nat. Hist.* no.7, 1983.

## Breeding Bird Survey and Christmas Bird Count Analysis

Below are maps of the average of the results for the years 1966 - 1989 for the Breeding Bird Surveys (BBS) and the Christmas Bird Count (CBC)<sup>1</sup>. They clearly show a shift from the north and west to the south and east of the red-headed woodpecker (RHWO) populations. In reviewing the Minnesota CBC results for the last 5 years, there are few RHWO's in the state during the winter. The Albert Lea CBC Circle reported 2 in 2009 and 2 in 2010; the Fargo Circle reported 1 in 2006; NW MacLeod reported 1 in 2008; Owatonna reported 3 in 2007; Rochester reported 3 in 2009; Winona reported 1 in 2007 and 1 in 2010. The notable exception to these reports are the reports from the Cedar Creek Bog Circle that reported none in 2006, 29 in 2007, 5 in 2008, 3 in 2009 and a record number of 35 in 2010.

In reviewing the BBS for the last 5 years for all the routes of Minnesota the results are as follows - 2006 - 21, 2007 - 36, 2008 - 31, 2009 - 24 and 2010 - 13. Historically for the period going back to 1967 the maximum was 241, found in 1983 and the minimum was in 2010 which only recorded 13! These numbers not only show the movement of the RHWO in the winter but also demonstrate the decline of the RHWO in Minnesota. Again a notable exception is the number of breeding pair that have been reported by the Red-headed Woodpecker Recovery (RhWR) at the Cedar Creek Ecosystems Science Reserve. The RhWR found 18 pair in 2008, 20 in 2009 and 23 in 2010.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/id/framlst/i4060id.html>



Source: <http://www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/id/framlst/i4060id.html>

## Audubon's Migration Note

... inasmuch as many of them remain in the Southern Districts during the whole winter, and breed there in summer. The greater number, however, pass to countries farther south. Their migration takes place under night, is commenced in the middle of September, and continues for a month or six weeks. They then fly very high above the trees, far apart, like a disbanded army, propelling themselves by reiterated flaps of the wings, at the end of each successive curve which they describe in their flight. The note which they emit at this time is different from the usual one, sharp and easily heard from the ground, although the birds may be out of sight. This note is continued, as if it were necessary for keeping the straggling party in good humour. At dawn of day, the whole alight on the tops of the dead trees about the plantations, and remain in search of food until the approach of sunset, when they again, one after another, mount the air, and continue their journey.

- John James Audubon

## Spring Issue Feature Topic

The Spring issue's topic will be "Will the spread of the emerald ash borer help the RHWO recovery?" Send your observations and references to Jerry Bahls (rhwracm@comcast.net) by April 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 **Feb. 16th and Mar. 16th..** 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.

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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 \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

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