



## **Ruffed Grouse Society Northeast Region FAN Update September 2015**

Time flies when you're having fun (or too busy to notice!), and summer's gone already. Hopefully I'll have fun at a slightly less hectic pace this fall... which is now (whew!). I'm excited about hunting season (so what's new?) for a couple of reasons. One is that I think grouse and woodcock hunting prospects in the Northeast look really good this year. Sure, June was pretty soggy in many areas (and June being peak month of hatch for grouse) but from what I and others have seen for grouse broods this summer, many seemed to have survived chick-hood pretty well. For instance, 16 braces of dogs at the New England Open Grouse Championship field trial in NH this September moved over 60 grouse and 15 woodcock. That's a lot of birds. Add to that the abundance of grouse foods - I've seen loads of fruit on viburnums, hawthorn, grapes, dogwoods, and mountain ash, a fair apple crop, decent numbers of acorns, and it's a beech nut year too (grouse LOVE beech nuts). AND the dry summer seems to have caused some trees to shut down early and begin dropping leaves, so visibility may be good earlier than usual - I've noticed early leaf fall in some areas among ash, black cherry, red maple, aspen and elm. Fall is also a great time to prospect for habitat project areas, and no better way than with a canine guide - more on that later. Another reason for my cheery disposition is kids and dogs. After a few years of promoting getting kids into hunting and taking a few on their first duck hunts, it's my kids turn; one of them has a new bird dog pup and the goal is for my son to smell the smoke of fresh spent shells while the pup tastes feathers. We'll see how that goes. In this issue we've got hunting season dates and hunter surveys that could use your participation, the annual woodcock status report, and some "items in the news". PLUS - I'll be asking successful hunters to save me one nice grouse for next summer's youth events.

Good hunting,

- *Andy*

# American Woodcock Population Status, 2015

By Thomas R. Cooper and Rebecca Rau, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

*Abstract:* American Woodcock Singing-ground Survey data for 2015 indicate that the index for singing American woodcock (*Scolopax minor*) males in both the Eastern and Central Management Regions was not significantly different from 2014. The Eastern Management Region had a significant, declining 10-year (2005-2015) trend of -1.56%/year, which marks the second year in a row there has been a declining 10-year trend. The 10-year trend in the Central Management Region was not significant after showing a decline last year. Both regions have a significant, long-term (1968-15) declining trend (-1.1%/year for the Eastern Management Region and -0.7 %/year for the Central Management Region). The 2014 recruitment index for the U.S. portion of the Eastern Region (1.49 immatures per adult female) was 6.9% less than the 2013 index and 8.9% less than the long-term regional index, while the recruitment index for the U.S. portion of the Central Region (1.39 immatures per adult female) was 9.6% less than the 2013 index and was 10.6% less than the long-term regional index. Estimates from the Harvest Information Program indicated that U.S. woodcock hunters in the Eastern Region spent 119,700 days afield and harvested 58,600 woodcock during the 2014-15 season, while in the Central Region, hunters spent 227,600 days afield and harvested 141,500 woodcock.

*Andy's Note:* Woodcock numbers in 2015 remained fairly close to 2014 levels across New York and New England, but declined slightly in the Maritimes. *High note:* Massachusetts saw a small increase on the woodcock survey. *Higher note:* May, the peak month of woodcock hatch in the Northeast, was pretty durned nice, so broods should have fared well. *Low note:* The woodcock survey index in Connecticut was down about 10%. The entire report can be viewed at <http://www.fws.gov/migratorybirds/NewReportsPublications/PopulationStatus.html>

*p.s. when the woods are very dry like it's been in August and much of September here, woodcock may be scarce in the usual alders and second-growth hardwoods. If that's case, try the very wet swamp edges and also young, dense conifer stands such as spruce or fir or even young pine, at any location, but especially on north- and east-facing slopes. Even though the soil under conifers is poor worm habitat, the soil moisture often will be higher than in the hardwoods and woodcock will feed on other invertebrates among the conifers until rains return and worms and other meaty morsels again become available.*



## The Fall Hunt Calendar

Grouse season opened September 20 in New York's North Zone. The rest of upstate



opens on October 1, concurrently with the woodcock season. Vermont was the next to open, with grouse season starting October 26 statewide, and the woodcock season coming in October 1. The woods in Maine and New Hampshire open to grouse and woodcock hunting October 1. Massachusetts begins woodcock hunting on October 7, with grouse hunting starting October 17. Connecticut seasons come in on October 17 for grouse, and October 23 for woodcock. Rhode Island's woodcock season starts October 17; there currently is no open season for grouse hunting in Rhode Island.

For folks looking for hunting opportunities beyond state and industrial forest lands, consider checking out the forestlands owned and/or managed by the New England Forestry Foundation (NEFF). NEFF has 26,000 such acres on properties throughout New England

(<http://www.newenglandforestry.org/explore-our-woods/forest-map-test>), most of which are open to hunting (<http://www.newenglandforestry.org/explore-our-woods/hunting-faqs/hunting-on-neff-land>). You may want to check them out from home on Google Earth before making the drive. If you go, drop me a note about the condition of the habitat – whether it was good and held birds, or if it needs improvement.

Also, most of our Drummer Funds and much of my time are spent on efforts to improve state-owned lands. However, if there are other open-access lands, such as county forests that you know of that you think the managers would be open to grouse and/or woodcock management, let me know and we can explore the opportunity.

# NH Ruffed Grouse Wing and Tail Survey

## *Statewide New Hampshire Survey*

New Hampshire Fish and Game conducts an annual grouse wing and tail survey throughout the state to help gain critical information about ruffed grouse in New Hampshire. Hunter participation is key to this effort -- we need your help!

**Win a gun!** All those who turn in completed and useable grouse study survey packets will be entered into a drawing for a quality shotgun donated by the Ruffed Grouse Society.



## **How to take part:**

Any grouse hunter can participate by picking up grouse sample packets, which include envelopes and survey cards for two grouse samples, from any of the participating locations listed on the website listed below. Hunters are asked to remove all tissue from wing and tail samples and to let them dry completely before placing the samples in the envelopes. Do NOT place the samples in plastic of any kind. Hunters should place only one wing and tail in each envelope with the corresponding completed survey card. Completed packets must be returned to one of these locations.

Packets will be available as of **September 28, 2015**, check the following website for locations:

<http://www.wildlife.state.nh.us/surveys/ruffed-grouse.html>

**Win a gun!** All those who turn in completed and useable grouse study survey packets will be entered into a drawing for a quality shotgun donated by the Ruffed Grouse Society.

Please let other ruffed grouse enthusiasts know about this survey and help us increase participation this year, and say thanks to these business owners for their effort, as well.

For more information on the grouse survey, call Karen Bordeau, NH Fish and Game Small Game Project Leader, at Fish and Game's Region 2 Office in New Hampton, NH, at (603) 744-5470.



# New York Grouse and Woodcock Hunting Log

**Grouse and woodcock hunters needed!** (for more info visit <http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/9351.html>)

This survey asks hunters to record their daily grouse and woodcock hunting activities in a "hunting log", including the number of grouse and woodcock flushed, the number of hours hunted, the number of birds killed, and if a dog was used to hunt. The primary purpose of the log is to monitor the number of birds flushed per hour. Grouse and woodcock share many of the same habitats, so the information you provide will help monitor populations of both of these great game birds as habitats change both locally and on a landscape scale.



Print or download the [2015-16 Ruffed Grouse and American Woodcock Hunting Log \(PDF\)](#), or contact us to get on our mailing list (see contact information below).

Completed survey forms can be sent to:  
Grouse Log, NYSDEC  
625 Broadway, Albany, NY 12233-4754  
Phone: (518) 402-8886  
e-mail: [fwwildf@gw.dec.state.ny.us](mailto:fwwildf@gw.dec.state.ny.us) (Please include "Grouse Log" in the subject line.)

After you have completed your hunting log, you can contact the Department at the address above for a postage-paid envelope to send in your data sheet(s).

After data have been analyzed, your hunting log will be returned to you along with a report of this survey (full reports from previous seasons can be found in the links in the left-hand column of the above website). In subsequent years, you will receive a hunting log in the mail just prior to the hunting season. The personal information you provide (e.g., name, address) will be kept confidential.

Thanks and good luck!



*Grouse log cooperators arm patches*

## Bird Hunting Opportunities to Support RGS

Join RGS for the **4<sup>th</sup> Annual NY Grouse and Woodcock Benefit Hunt** October 16-18, 2015 based at *On The Wing Grouse Camp* in Ellenburg, NY. This is a two-day guided hunt - Saturday and Sunday - and includes a banquet dinner. Hunter numbers are limited to 26. Contact Bruce Bennett 413-237-1054 at [bbennett82@comcast.net](mailto:bbennett82@comcast.net) or Tripp Way [TrippW@ruffedgrousesociety.org](mailto:TrippW@ruffedgrousesociety.org).



Also, check out the **Upland Bird Hunt in the PA Wilds** November 5 to November 7, 2015, based out of The Red Fern, Kersey, PA. Contact: Mary Hosmer at 814-512-2101 or [wlab@windstream.net](mailto:wlab@windstream.net).

### Grouse Needed!



How about committing to donating **one** grouse this season for our youth programs in the Northeast? This past summer, RGS collaborated with 4-H Shooting Sports/Bryant Pond Conservation Camp

and the Sebasticook Chapter of the North American Versatile Hunting Dog Association in Maine (see the UMaine 4-H Camp & Learning Center at Bryant Pond Facebook 2015 Maine Sports Afield album:

<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.1019333731424239.1073741865.133333920024229&type=3> and the Sebasticook NAVHDA Bryant Pond Youth Day album:

<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.1625302047711961.1073741847.1553595104882656&type=3>), and with the Pennsylvania Drummers Leadership Academy in PA to introduce kids to game birds, gun dogs, and hunting. Our plan is to expand



to more camps in more states next summer. A key component is the hands-on dissection and study of ruffed grouse and other game birds, modeled after the successful Pennsylvania Drummers Leadership Academy (see article on PA Drummers in Fall 2014 *Ruffed Grouse Society* magazine), and for that we need a few grouse. So if you're inclined to help, save a whole (dead) ruffed grouse in good condition. The best way to keep a grouse in good shape (this goes for saving a bird for mounting, too, by the way) is to slip it head-first into a knee-high stocking (e.g. *Leggs* brand – photo above) and put it in the freezer. Once it's frozen, seal the stockinged bird in a plastic bag and keep frozen until you can get it to me – call or email me ([andyw@ruffedgrousesociety.org](mailto:andyw@ruffedgrousesociety.org)). Thanks!



## **Drummer Fund Projects in Vermont**

Two Drummer Fund projects were completed this summer in Vermont – creation of brood habitat (“wildlife opening”) on the Plymbsbury WMA, and apple tree releases and brood opening reclamation on the Steam Mill Brook WMA. Next on the list for Vermont, likely this fall, is improvement of woodcock night roost, singing grounds, and diurnal habitat at the Groton State Forest.

## **Maine Ruffed Grouse Research in 2<sup>nd</sup> Year**



Late this summer, I assisted University of Maine researchers Dr. Erik Blomberg and graduate student Samantha Davis (photo: Erik has the beard) on their field study of ruffed grouse survival and habitat preference (among other objectives), and was fortunate to be along one evening when



2 birds were captured for the study. To hear a radio story on the project, follow this link for 92.9 FM (Bangor, ME) Radio September 12, 2015 broadcast of Bob Duchesne's Wild Maine: <http://929theticket.com/bob-duchesnes-wild-maine-tracking-the-ruffed-grouse-audio>.

## **Secretary Jewell Announces New England Cottontail to be Excluded from Endangered Species List**

*Innovative conservation partnership saves rabbit that inspired "Peter Cottontail" from extinction, provides model for success through Endangered Species Act*

Date: September 11, 2015

DOVER, N.H. – Today, U.S. Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell announced that a public-private partnership uniting foresters, farmers, birdwatchers, biologists, hunters and other conservationists has saved the New England cottontail from needing protection under the Endangered Species Act. The partnership has also initiated on-the-ground conservation efforts for the cottontail that will benefit the rabbit into the future.

Jewell was joined by U.S. Senator Jeanne Shaheen, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Dan Ashe, U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service Chief Jason Weller, and other conservation partners at an event to celebrate the success of the multi-state effort.

"Thanks to the dedication of many partners, we can now say that future generations of Americans will know the cottontail – and not just through a character in children's literature," said Secretary Jewell. "This is a great Endangered Species Act success story of how proactive conservation across a landscape can benefit not only the cottontail, but other wildlife, and people who rely on healthy New England forests."

The New England cottontail – the inspiration for author Thornton W. Burgess's "The Adventures of Peter Cottontail" – is the only rabbit native to New England and east of the Hudson River in New York. The rabbit was classified as a candidate for Endangered Species Act protection beginning in 2006. Recognizing both the urgency and the opportunity to conserve the species, in 2008, state and federal biologists began a coordinated conservation effort that has fueled the species' path to recovery. That effort includes the development of a rangewide, science-based conservation strategy that has targeted ambitious but achievable goals.

Great strides have been made in making the strategy a success. Approximately 10,500 New England cottontails now live in a priority area, which brings the recovery effort three-quarters of the way towards the goal of 13,500 cottontails in healthy, young forest landscapes by 2030. Habitat projects are also producing increased numbers of cottontails.

"This initiative is a model for combining science, resources and public-private collaboration to advance the conservation of a species previously destined for federal protection," said Service Director Dan Ashe. "This is a moment for us all to feel proud – proud of the partnerships we forged among state and federal governments, landowners, conservation organizations, tribes and businesses; and proud of the



successes those efforts brought. It's a terrific day for conservation and a terrific day for the New England cottontail.”

For the full press release go to: <https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/secretary-jewell-announces-new-england-cottontail-be-excluded-endangered-species-list>.

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## **Upcoming RGS Events in the Region**

For additional details or events please see RGS' [Banquets & Events](#) Schedule

**October 16-18** – 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Northern New York Grouse and Woodcock Hunt, hosted by *On The Wing Grouse Camp*, Ellenburg, NY; contact Bruce Bennett 413-237-1054 or [bbennett82@comcast.net](mailto:bbennett82@comcast.net)

**November 13** – Central New York Chapter Annual Banquet. 6:00 pm, Genesee Grand Hotel, Syracuse, NY. Contact Norm Webber 315-697-3377, [lutherwebb@earthlink.net](mailto:lutherwebb@earthlink.net).

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Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions:

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