



# Ruff Country News Minnesota

*Winter Edition December 2015*

*Meadow Kouffeld-Hansen and Ted Dick*

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*Heidi Hansen follows dad, Jayson Hansen, on a warm fall morning. Heidi was good for about a mile of walking this year, maybe two miles next year. I certainly did my share of packing her back out of the woods! Meadow*

Season's greetings and happy holidays! Fall is coming to an end, the woodcock have long since departed, and the "King" remains. I hope you are enjoying the unusually warm weather with late season outings in the grouse woods. I have been fortunate enough to get out a few times and enjoy the woods without trudging through deep snow or suffering frozen fingers (although wet feet aren't so fun either). I know that I am not alone in my late season endeavors and have been hearing good reports from others. Regardless of weather conditions, grouse season will come to an end and we will have plenty of months to ponder the 2015 season and anticipate what 2016 will bring. I hope to see you in the coming months at one of our fundraising banquets or events. We are discussing some fun new things for 2016 and really hope you enjoy. *Meadow Kouffeld-Hansen, Regional Biologist.*

## **Message from Ted Dick, RGS/DNR Forest Game Bird Coordinator in Minnesota**

Season's Greetings from Grand Rapids, MN. It certainly doesn't feel like the Holidays with the lack of snow and cold so far this winter. On the plus side, snowless conditions have made it easy to get out in the woods so the grouse

season has been fun-I suggest you get out there while you can. The negative is that winters like this one and last are tougher on Minnesota grouse. As we've mentioned previously, ruffed grouse use snow roosts for both improved thermal efficiency and probably concealment from predators.

We sometimes take it for granted that we can hunt all the time especially after the season has been open for several months-- but then once it closes I invariably think: "I should have hunted more when I had the chance". Remember now that it's a long nine months until next September...

In this issue of the Ruff Country Newsletter you'll find information on more grouse and woodcock related projects than we've ever had before. From multi-million dollar forest habitat protection proposals to habitat improvement work to online maps and data to help you find new places to explore: all happening right now and all designed to make your Minnesota grouse hunting more enjoyable. If you read anything here that you'd like to learn more about, get in touch with me or Meadow any time. Thank you for your continued support of Minnesota Grouse Hunting and the Ruffed Grouse and American Woodcock Societies and Happy Holidays... *Ted Dick, MNDNR/RGS Forest Game Bird Coordinator*

### 2015 National Hunt Grand Rapids, MN

The 34<sup>th</sup> Annual National Grouse and Woodcock Hunt took place this year on October 8 and 9 in Grand Rapids, MN. The mild fall resulted in more leaves on the trees than usual but scenting conditions were good with plenty of moisture from recent rainfalls. In total 102 hunters participated in the hunt and harvested 149 ruffed grouse and 357 American woodcock. Hunter harvest of grouse was the second lowest in the history of the hunt and based on the information collected from the ruffed grouse harvested the index for reproductive success was 40 percent lower than the hunt's mean. This means that there were few young birds in the fall 2015 population. We will be looking forward to next year's hunt and the tradition that comes with it.



*Dan Dessecker in foreground with Blu, his female shorthair pointer, take a rest during the Friday morning hunt.*

## December Staff Meeting in Pittsburgh, PA

All Ruffed Grouse Society / American Woodcock Society staff convened upon the national headquarters office in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania during the first few days of December 2015. The three day meeting provided the opportunity for all staff members to share some of the events in their respective regions as well as discuss future developments for our conservation organizations. Some of the more important topics of discussion regarded the importance of member involvement in land management planning for

national, state and county forests (i.e. showing up at planning meetings and providing comments that reflect your interest in young forests), more educational opportunities coming in the near future, and several communications and outreach efforts that you should be seeing in 2016. These are exciting times for us and we are making great strides to stay current and a force behind young forests and the species they support including our beloved game birds.



*All staff members of the Ruffed Grouse Society and American Woodcock Society stand for a group portrait during the December staff meeting in Pittsburgh, PA the first week of December, 2015.*

## Update on Partners: Vermillion Community College and the Minnesota DNR for Ely, MN HWTs

As you may recall, in August 2015, the Ruffed Grouse Society provided \$5,000.00 in Minnesota Drummer Funds to the Vermillion Community College Natural Resources Department for the purchase of chain saws, brush saws and hand tools to be used to create and maintain hunter walking trails in the immediate Ely, MN area. The terrain in the Ely area makes maintenance using tractors difficult due to the amount of exposed rock. Damage to machinery while operating under these conditions is cost prohibitive and unsafe. Vermillion Community College has since

purchased the equipment including gas powered brush saws, chain saws, personal protective equipment, and various hand tools. This fall the students completed the Echo Lake Hunter Walking Trail to the north of Ely, MN. Students are currently in the process of coordinating with land managers to find a location for the 2016 Hunter Walking Trail project. Students will continue to develop new hunter walking trails for the next 10 years under the agreement signed between the Ruffed Grouse Society and Vermillion Community College.

## Private Landowner Cooperation with ABC

This fall we have been busy gearing up for winter activities including private lands management efforts in cooperation with other conservation organizations. One of the collaborators in Minnesota is Kevin Sheppard, a forester for the American Bird Conservancy. Currently the American Bird Conservancy works with different ownerships to manage for golden-winged warbler habitat which fortunately benefits grouse and woodcock. Over the last couple of years the American Bird Conservancy has been funding early successional habitat work on both public and private ownerships including brushland shearing and timber sale design geared toward

golden-winged warblers. This summer we had the opportunity to tour some recent work on the Pine Ridge Grouse Camp, owned by Jerry Havel. This winter we are collaborating with ABC to help design a property management plan and apply for federal funding to help manage the Lucky 11 Hunting Club for golden-winged warblers and subsequently improve grouse and woodcock habitat. If successful this project site would be available for habitat tours and an example of how conservation organizations, agencies and private landowners can work together to improve habitat across private ownerships.



*Left to Right: Ted Dick, Nick Maki, Meadow Kouffeld-Hansen visiting the Lucky 11 Club to discuss habitat management with ABC forester Kevin Sheppard and NRCS forestry staff.*

## 2016 Women's Upland Course

The Ruffed Grouse Society has applied for a Cabela's Grant to fund an upland game hunting course for women. It is planned that the course will be initially conducted in the Grand Rapids, Minnesota area.

The Women's Upland Course will give women interested in hunting upland game and shooting shotguns the opportunity to learn with others that are of similar skill and experience levels. Course size is currently set at 20 women, will cost around \$110 and will run from April- October with once a month meetings. Course meetings will start with an

educational 30-45 minute presentation followed by time on the range shooting either trap, five-stand, or skeet depending on progress.

This course will provide an opportunity for women to develop gun safety, cleaning, and handling skills as well as introduce them to upland game management, hunting techniques, and cooking. Activities will be specific to upland bird hunting (primarily ruffed grouse and American woodcock) and will be taught by Meadow Kouffeld-Hansen, a regional biologist for RGS/AWS, and by

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volunteer and paid instructors that are experienced with assisting and encouraging new shooters. Women completing the course will gain exposure to a broad set of experiences and skills that will give them the confidence to join their friends and family in the field. It is hoped that the course will culminate with a pheasant hunt on a shooting preserve with volunteer guides and dog handlers (pending funding). This will be the first offering of this course and it is hoped that

it will be an annual event offered in the area and will encourage greater participation by women in the shooting sports and upland hunting. This course can be expanded to other portions of the country through the network of RGS/AWS chapter volunteers and staff. Those interested in attending or know someone who might be, or interested in volunteering time or providing support, please write or call Meadow Kouffeld-Hansen (contact information at the end of the newsletter).

### 2015 Mentored Hunts



RGS continues to participate in Minnesota's Mentored Hunt program. We had the pleasure of taking several people out this year in various parts of the state. It's always a good time and the participants seem to really appreciate the effort. Those of you that know Mark Fouts of the Ruffed Grouse Society are



aware that he is developing a new education effort for RGS and he is looking for chapter volunteers to serve as youth education coordinators. There will be lots of opportunities to get involved in the future-it's important to our sport for everyone to pass along the tradition.

## Historic \$5 Million RGS/MDHA Proposal Progressing through the Legislature

As mentioned in previous newsletters, RGS is a proud sponsor along with the Minnesota Deer Hunters Association of a Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage proposal to acquire key parcels of available land in the central lakes region of Minnesota. Currently in the recommendation package headed to the legislature, this 5.3 million dollar project would acquire land that would otherwise be sold off to private parties. The acquisition will protect water quality in a region of our state that is losing large amounts of land to intensive agriculture and would keep forest

habitat on the ground and available to grouse, woodcock and deer hunters as well as other recreational users. As a coworker told me earlier this year; this is the kind of effort that RGS should publicize-every grouse hunter should care about keeping forest habitat forested and open to public hunting. There will be much more work to do to get this proposal through the legislature including potentially some lobbying efforts. Hopefully this will be the first of several proposals like this-they are important to the future of public hunting.

## Ruffed Grouse Management Areas Now Online

Ruffed Grouse Management Areas (RGMAs) are a great destination for the hunter looking to experience grouse and woodcock hunting in Minnesota. RGMAs are located in areas that have good potential for producing grouse and woodcock and are managed to promote suitable habitat conditions for these species.

Ruffed Grouse Management Areas:

- Range in size from 400 to 4800 acres.

- Occupy over 100,000 acres in total, in 49 designated locations.
- Contain 184 miles of hunter walking trails.
- Allow dogs and hunting.

Thanks to funding from the Ruffed Grouse Society, you will now find maps and downloadable GPS data for these RGMAs on the Minnesota DNR's website at

<http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/rgma/index.html>

## Woodcock GPS Transmitters Deployed in Minnesota

This fall a few American woodcock went south outfitted with satellite transmitters (PTTs) as part of cutting-edge research conducted by the USGS Arkansas Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit, USGS Minnesota Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit, and the USFWS. These solar-powered PTTs are small enough to fit on a woodcock's back during migration and powerful enough to transmit

multiple locations to the ARGOS satellite network.

Other cooperators providing assistance and funding are the Ruffed Grouse Society and American Woodcock Society (RGS and AWS), Texas Parks & Wildlife Department, The Glassen Foundation, Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Louisiana Department of Wildlife & Fisheries, Minnesota Department of



Natural Resources, the University of Arkansas, and Woodcock Limited.

The location data from this project will be used to document timing of migration initiation, rate of migration, stopover length, routes taken, and final destination for both spring and fall migration. These data can then

be used to identify priority areas to focus habitat management and conservation efforts for woodcock along migration routes.

Our Minnesota Drummer Funds contributed \$4,000.00 to pay for transmitters that were deployed in Minnesota and we look forward to tracking their movements. If you are interested in checking in on their locations or would like more specific information on the research being done check out the Ruffed Grouse Society website. There is an interesting map that shows up to date locations of tagged individuals and other information that you might find fascinating.

<http://www.ruffedgrousesociety.org/woodcockmigration>.

## Media and Member Outreach

Times are changing! With RGS's recent hire of a social media and marketing specialist and increased use of digital communication in the modern world we are working to adapt. If you are a Facebook user be sure to "Like" our [Minnesota and Western U.P. Ruffed Grouse Society Facebook page](#) to get the up-to-date happenings, follow stories and view photos from the field. Additionally, the Ruffed Grouse Society maintains a [National Facebook page](#). Another great way to stay in touch and follow us and what our organizations and members are up to from day to day.

In addition to social media we have been showcased in a number of Minnesota podcasts, radio interviews, and newspaper editorials. These contacts have resulted in some great memories like Dave Orrick the Outdoor Writer for the St. Paul Pioneer Press shooting his first woodcock during an interview with staff to memorable moments in radio stations. Although, the more important part of media contact is being able to share our story with the larger audience. Although Minnesota has one of the largest grouse hunting populations we lag behind Michigan and Wisconsin for member numbers. Exposure through media is one way we can close that gap

## RGS Policy Efforts in Minnesota

We frequently mention in this newsletter that while RGS-funded habitat projects are important, an equally important aspect of the

RGS effort in Minnesota is influencing policy at all levels of resource management. We are in constant communication with state, federal,

county and private resource managers and administrators. We educate through seminars and field tours on the value of young forest. We communicate the importance of sound timber management. We get involved. Here in Minnesota, we work with the state forest planning process to push for areas of more intensive forest management that benefit the

suite of species that thrive in younger forests. We continue to monitor legislative initiatives that could influence grouse hunter opportunities and we advocate for policies that would serve to increase grouse hunter satisfaction such as the recent trapping regulation change proposals regarding body gripping traps.

### *Dessecker Testifies before U.S. Senate on Wildfire Impacts to USFS Resource Management*

Although you may not be directly impacted by wildfires out west, your hunting opportunities are! The current dedication of approximately 50% of the United States Forest Service (USFS) budget to combat these natural disasters is significantly affecting the ability of the agency to meet wildlife-related and other forest plan objectives and public expectations. Common-sense solutions, such as targeted categorical exclusions, to redundant project planning requirements are essential. Likewise, fiscally responsible funding protocols to ease the financial burden on the USFS and other federal land management agencies from wildfire suppression costs would enhance the ability of these agencies to succeed in their efforts to conserve our nation's wildlife and secure our nation's hunting heritage.

This fall our Director of Conservation Policy, Dan Dessecker, testified before the U.S. Senate on behalf of upland game hunters. He emphasized the importance of increasing the diversity of forest wildlife habitats on our National Forests across the nation and the importance of meeting forest goals. Of

particular note, the National Forests in the eastern United States have consistently failed to meet minimum goals for young forest and other early successional habitats as outlined in existing forest plans (only 24% of goal). This failure has resulted in substantial declines in populations of game and nongame wildlife that depend upon these important habitats.

Declines in young forest habitats due to a lack of active management on National Forests and surrounding landscapes throughout much of the East have led to declines in ruffed grouse populations. Legislation to help enable the USFS to protect rural communities from the devastation wrought by wildfires while at the same time meet its multiple-use mandate remains a work in progress. The Ruffed Grouse Society will continue to work with the Obama Administration and our elected officials in Congress to find a fix for a wildfire funding process that is seriously broken. If needed, we won't hesitate to reach out to our members and ask that you lend your voice in support of the necessary legislative fix. Stay tuned.

### *Minnesota's Proposed Toxic Shot Ban and Possession Limit Increase*

It has come up before and was dropped but the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources is once again proposing a ban on toxic shot on Farmland Wildlife Management Areas. As most of us know the toxicity of lead shot in the environment and how it affects predatory birds and prey species alike is a wildlife management concern. Currently using non-toxic shot in the field is a personal decision for upland game hunters in Minnesota with the exception of some federally owned lands. Additional to the proposed ban on toxic shot use the MN DNR has proposed to increase the possession limit of grouse from 10 to 15 to be consistent with the rest of the state's game bird limits. Our organizations do not have an objection to the proposed increase in the possession limit of ruffed grouse. However, we do not support the

proposed ban on use of lead shot on Wildlife Management Areas in the Farmland Zone.

Our concern is that the ban of lead shot may reduce hunter participation and recruitment due to increased cost of non-toxic ammunition and non-compatibility of non-toxic shot with many antique firearms. For some, the use of antique firearms are a part of their hunting tradition. We would rather that the State of Minnesota wait to propose this ban until information on hunter participation can be obtained from other states (e.g. California) that have bans/planned bans on lead shot. It is preferred that the State of Minnesota revisit this proposed ban when we can be certain that the requirement for use of non-toxic shot does not impact hunter participation.

### *New RGMA Development Stalled in Forest Planning Process*

Recently RGS contacted MN DNR Commissioner Tom Landwehr regarding the stalling of the development of several new Ruffed Grouse Management Areas in northern Minnesota. These RGMAs fall under Management Opportunity Areas (MOAs) which are areas that are managed more intensively for wildlife habitat. Many types of MOAs are currently a point of contention between the Forestry, Wildlife and Ecological Waters Divisions and as a result the development of new RGMAs has been stalled. The letter to

Commissioner Landwehr both thanked the DNR for past and future collaboration efforts as well as brought up our concern regarding the planning processes that require Forestry, Wildlife and Ecological Waters Divisions to cooperate. This is one example of how RGS works hard to improve your grouse hunting by advocating for policies that benefit grouse hunters. Influencing wildlife and forest management policy at every level is the most effective way to maintain healthy forests and abundant wildlife populations on a large scale.

## Habitat Projects

### *Update: Little Willow WMA Aitkin Area Hunter Walking Trail Development*

This summer the Ruffed Grouse Society capitalized on another great opportunity to use Drummer Funds to put in just over 6 miles of new hunter walking trails in association with the Little River WMA west of Aitkin MN. A contractor created a series of new trails into a one year old aspen stand using a Fecon mulching head attached to a skidsteer tractor. One of the immediate needs was to plant the newly created trails with clover seed but staff time was short. Nate Thom, the Assistant Area Wildlife Manager for the Aitkin/Brainerd area, reached out for RGS member volunteers. RGS members Jerry Moehnke of Arden Hills, MN

and Craig Heusinkveld of White Bear Lake, MN stepped up to seed the newly developed trails. Their time will no doubt result in years of enhanced grouse hunting opportunity on these trails. A big thank you to both of them!



### *Three Island Hunter Walking Trail, Beltrami County Grouse Management Area*

DJ Bakken, a Beltrami County, MN Forester, has big plans for ruffed grouse hunters in the Bemidji, MN area and the Ruffed Grouse Society is happy to help him follow through with those plans. DJ recently returned to Minnesota after spending a long stint of time in Montana as a forester. He is passionate about grouse hunting and spent a fair amount of time out west hunting grouse and quail over his German wirehair pointers. DJ values having places to hunt that limit the use of motorized vehicles and has values closely aligned with RGS. Recently the Ruffed Grouse Society pitched in for the development of several new Hunter Walking Trail loops on one of DJ's projects, the Three Island County Park Grouse Management Area. Meadow Kouffeld-Hansen accompanied DJ Bakken on a field tour to place signs and visit two other potential Beltrami County Grouse Management Areas. Both of the

areas toured have tremendous potential and would be a great asset to hunters in the Bemidji area. Having natural resource professionals like DJ to work with is a wonderful thing for upland hunters. We look forward to working with DJ Bakken on future projects that enhance grouse hunting opportunities in the Bemidji, MN area.



*DJ Bakken stands by one of the barriers to the non-motorized trails on the Three Island Park Grouse Management Area*

### *Conservation Corps Minnesota & Iowa Buckthorn Removal Project*

The Twin Cities Chapter applied for and received a Conservation Partner's Legacy Grant for the removal of European buckthorn from WMAs in the Twin Cities area of Minnesota. This project has come to an end and resulted in the hand removal of European

Buckthorn from approximately 31 acres of land on the Janet Johnson WMA and Groundhouse WMA. European Buckthorn is an aggressive invasive species of shrub that dominates native understory species.

### *RGS/U.S. Forest Service Collaboration*

RGS will be meeting with resource managers from the Chippewa National Forest in mid-December to discuss a number of possible joint projects. One such project would be to have RGS serve as the project manager in the Forest Service's stewardship program. RGS would administer timber harvests and direct the proceeds to Hunter Walking Trail mowing/maintenance. More details later on

this. Ted has also had some brief discussions with biologists on the Superior National Forest concerning young forest habitat and hunter-related projects on that forest. See the RGS website for more information on the RGS Petition for Rulemaking to the U.S. Forest Service concerning forest management on USFS lands in the Eastern United States.

### *New Trail Mower Purchased by RGS for Warroad Chapter and MNDNR*

The RGS Lake of the Woods Chapter (Warroad area) has a great group of volunteers who like to stay active with projects. They've been working with DNR Area Offices like the one at Red Lake WMA. This year they asked if we could help the DNR get more Hunter Walking Trails mowed by purchasing a new mower to be shared between the chapter and the DNR Office. With the help of local business owner Jon Grad of Grad's Small Engine in Warroad and using Minnesota RGS Drummer Funds, a mower was purchased and delivered to Warroad on September 22. The mower has been kept busy this fall catching up on projects throughout the area. The chapter is also raising money for a new 50-mile Star of the North Trail project that will become a grouse hunting destination that will lure many traveling bird hunters to this great part of the state. Thanks to Chuck Lindner, Jared Olafson

and the rest of the committee and members of this busy RGS chapter.



*Jason Lanning, the Red Lake WMA Wildlife Technician, received the mower this fall.*

## Research Notes

Work continues on research projects at the Minnesota DNR. Dr. Charlotte Roy, DNR Grouse Research Biologist, is developing a spruce grouse survey that should be implemented this spring. Chris Scharenbroich, a GIS Specialist for DNR Fish and Wildlife has been working on mapping the known range boundary across Minnesota. Interesting to me that spruce grouse research studies were conducted in the Laporte/Park Rapids area in the early 1980s and it's been a long time since anyone has reported a spruce grouse in that area: they seem like they could potentially be vulnerable to changes in climate or it could be changes in the vegetative composition of the habitat. Thanks to Dr. Roy, Chris and area staff for continuing this important project.

Dr. Roy also continues work on her genetic analysis of Minnesota's sharp-tailed grouse populations.

Dr. Lindsey Shartell, Habitat Assessment Biologist for MNDNR, is working on several projects related to forest game birds. She continues working with assistants on the sharp-tailed grouse telemetry project and she is developing an analysis of forest wildlife openings and their use by a number of species including woodcock.

Jodie Provost, DNR Private Lands Biologist is working on a number of sharp-tailed grouse initiatives and collaborating with neighboring states and conservation groups across the country interested in open land and brushlands improvement and conservation including the North American Grouse Partnership. She and the rest of the DNR Forest Wildlife Habitat Team continue to work a variety of educational opportunities to spread the message about the importance of managing your land for forest wildlife benefits.



*Greg Greenwaldt December 12, 2015. Northwestern MN*

## Machine Update

The Minnesota Habitat Machine continues to grind out acres of habitat and miles of trail work in the Mille Lacs/Cambridge/Little Falls area of Central Minnesota. We'll have an

update on this year's accomplishments on the Minnesota and Western UP Facebook page by the end of the year.

## DNR has Trap Information Kits Available for Dog Owner Education

Another reminder that the DNR has assembled some kits containing different types of traps and information on how to remove the traps if your dog should happen to get into one. Body grip-style traps can be killers for dogs so it's important to know what to do if your dog gets caught. We tried out the kits at the RGS National Hunt in October and they generated a great deal of interest. Jerry Snetsinger (RGS member, huntsman and trapper shown in photo above) did a great job of educating the group on what to do if your dog gets trapped. It's smart to have experience in advance so you know what to do when the time comes. Contact Ted Dick or a local DNR office if your group would like to use one of these kits at your next meeting.



## Southeastern Minnesota Driftless Area Focus

It wasn't long ago Southeastern Minnesota (often called the Driftless Region) offered some excellent grouse hunting opportunities. In the early eighties, hunters could experience flush counts and harvests that rivaled other parts of the state. People frequently ask what happened to make that area so good for a while but then decline so quickly. There is interest in discussing what could be done and what it would take to improve conditions for early successional species in this part of the state. RGS is working to coordinate with

resource managers in Wisconsin, Iowa and Minnesota to organize a collaborative effort focused on these questions. Scott Walter, new RGS Biologist in Wisconsin, has a strong familiarity with these issues after having lived in the area and having worked on these issues in earlier positions. It wasn't turkeys eating grouse chicks that caused the change, but rather changes in land use, vegetation management and forestry practices that caused a drastic reduction in the brushy, thick, young forest habitat.

### Thank You!

That's all we have for you this time! RGS continues to work to improve our forests for ruffed grouse and woodcock as well as promote the future of hunting. Although it is always a bit sad to say goodbye to our favorite hunting season we have a lot to look forward to in 2016. Please keep in mind that there are Drummer Funds (money raised at banquets and additional fundraisers) available to do work in your area! If you have an idea on how your chapter might be able to spend Drummer Funds locally, please contact either Ted Dick

or myself, Meadow Kouffeld-Hansen. The work we put in today will benefit our children tomorrow and it is support from people like you, our members that will ensure that the values we hold dear today will continue to be important to the next generation. Keep in touch by checking out the RGS website or follow us on Facebook for more information about additional efforts RGS is making to improve our young forests and your grouse hunting.

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*The Ruffed Grouse Society is North America's foremost conservation organization dedicated to preserving our sporting traditions by creating healthy forest habitat for ruffed grouse, American woodcock and other wildlife. For information on the Ruffed Grouse Society/American Woodcock Society, please call 888-564-6747 or check out the RGS website at [www.ruffedgrousesociety.org](http://www.ruffedgrousesociety.org).*



*Get out with a friend and enjoy the last few days of the 2015 season. Ted and Meadow appraising habitat.*