



Ruff Country News & Timberdoodle Times

Covering the Northeast and South

July 25, 2016

Andrew Weik, Regional Wildlife Biologist for New York, New England, and Louisiana
Ruffed Grouse Society/American Woodcock Society
Freeville, NY Tel: (607) 793-4832 Email: andyw@ruffedgrousesociety.org

Across the Northeast we experienced a very mild winter. It was “the winter that wasn’t”. With the paltry snow-cover and mild temperatures, woodcock arrived back to our region very early – people were posting pictures of woodcock on social media in February, and birds were on eggs early. I get nervous when we get these mild late winter/early spring conditions, because I’ve seen April snowstorms wreak havoc on the newly-arrived timberdoodles. But this spring the other shoe never fell – spring may have been on the cool side of mild, but nothing out of the ordinary, certainly no significant stretches of cold precipitation that would cause problems for grouse and woodcock.

I was actually surprised that more woodcock didn’t come back sooner. I would not have really known that many woodcock were on a slow trek north were it

not for the satellite telemetry migration study. Some of the telemetered birds were among the early migrants, while others took a more leisurely pace. It's amazing what we can learn when we can track individual birds. By the way, the researchers from the Arkansas and Minnesota Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Units, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are beginning to wrap up the first phase of this research.

The fairly mild spring transitioned into warm, dry summer. Are we getting too much of a good thing? Here in central NY, I don't think I've mowed my lawn in the month of July, and I can't seem to water the vegetable garden enough. I'll share some thoughts on the possible effects on woodcock of prolonged dry conditions. Just as we look back to the spring weather and nesting conditions, we look forward to fall and perhaps planning travel or vacation time to optimize our time in the grouse and woodcock woods.

- *Andy*

View the 2015 RGS / AWS Annual Report from the below link.

<http://www.ruffedgrousesociety.org/PDF/2015-Annual-Report-Final.pdf>

Dan Dessecker Co-Chairs Special Session at International Wildlife Managers Conference

A Special Session at the 81st North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference this March in Pittsburgh, PA explored the potential future direction of our federal public forestlands. Co-chaired by the Ruffed Grouse Society's Dan Dessecker and Tom Franklin with the National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative, *2020 Vision: Federal Forest Management into the Next Decade* included speakers with vast expertise and a broad breadth of perspectives, including Robert Bonnie, Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment with the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The speakers agreed that there is clear scientific evidence indicating that the ecological integrity of our nation's public forest lands and the social fabric of nearby rural communities are imperiled. It is essential to make federal forest land management policy relevant to all interests so that the necessary statutory, regulatory, and fiscal fixes can be applied.

There was much discussion about the need to move beyond the rhetoric (“mandated timber harvest targets”, “benign neglect”, “stripping environmental regulation”, “analysis paralysis”, “unnecessary litigation”) and address this reality. Balanced, common sense legislation and administrative processes that allow for science-based active management of our public forestlands to conserve wildlife, enhance forest health and protect water quality while meeting society’s needs and interests is a lofty but achievable goal.

In his opening remarks, Dessecker read the following quote from a youth counselor as relayed in Richard Louv’s seminal book; *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*. “*In my first counseling job, with another organization, I took children with AIDS to the mountains who had never been out of their urban neighborhoods. One night, a nine-year-old woke me up. She had to go to the bathroom. We stepped outside of the tent and she looked up. She gasped and grabbed my leg. She had never seen the stars before.*” Dessecker underscored the imperative of making our federal public lands relevant to those who have never seen the stars if we are to successfully meet the challenges sure to be posed in the future by an increasingly urban society.

Managing Habitat for Ruffed Grouse Forester Workshop in New Hampshire Well Attended

The Ruffed Grouse Society and University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension teamed up with New Hampshire Fish & Game, New Hampshire Forests & Lands, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to present a one-day grouse habitat management workshop for foresters and motivated landowners in early June. NRCS biologist Wendy Ward explained the federal assistance programs available to reimburse private landowners for approved habitat improvement activities. The workshop was generously hosted by landowner, RGS member, and NH Coverts cooperator Fred Ernst on his grouse-managed property in southwestern NH.

We started out the morning in the barn with a PowerPoint presentation on grouse ecology and forest management to benefit grouse and other young-forest and mature-forest wildlife. After applying tick repellent, the group headed to the woods to tour (and admire!) the regenerating harvested areas and discuss the forest management in relation to the habitat needs of grouse and other wildlife. The workshop finished up over lunch with a discussion of forest management planning and the next timber harvest options to benefit grouse on Mr. Ernst’s woodland.

Thirty people from across NH, VT, and MA attended; forestry professionals were eligible for continuing education credits through the Society of American Foresters and the NH Professional Logger Program. The forestry and wildlife knowledge base of the presenters and participants was impressive, and we had excellent discussions in the barn and in the field.

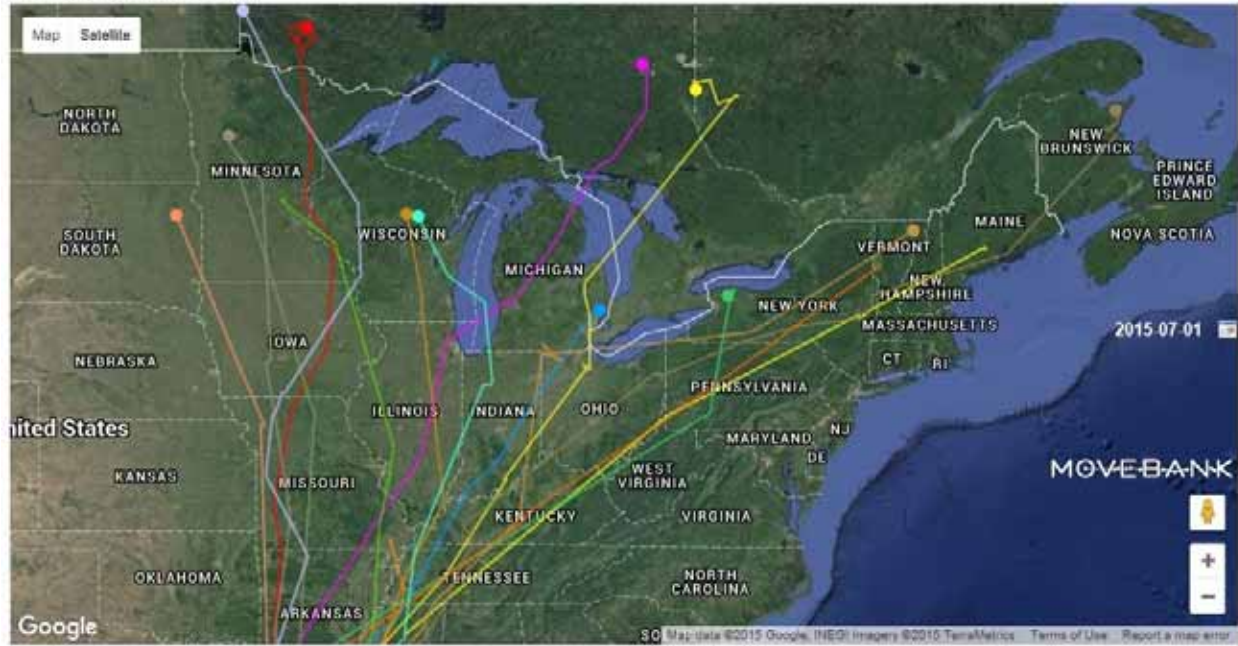
Update on Woodcock Migration Satellite Telemetry Study



Woodcock migration has become even more interesting since this satellite telemetry study began. In spring and fall since the beginning of the study, my early morning ritual has been to sit down at computer, pull up the RGS website (<http://www.ruffedgrousesociety.org/woodcockmigration>) and sip coffee while I catch up on the latest movements of the telemetered timberdoodles. Spring 2015's northward migration, emanating from a fairly small but important part of the wintering range in Texas and Louisiana, revealed a wide breadth of breeding ground affinities

all across the north country from South Dakota and the eastern border of Manitoba, clear over to eastern New Brunswick. All but one woodcock made its nesting season home in Canada or the northern tier of states, supporting our understanding that the core breeding range of woodcock is the twin tiers of U.S. and Canada.

Spring 2015 Migration



This past January, additional woodcock were captured and fitted with transmitters in Texas and Louisiana in the final field season for this phase of the study; this batch of birds has a distribution of final nesting season destinations very similar to 2015 – twin tiers from Manitoba to New Brunswick – but the pace of migration for many of the woodcock seemed to be slower. To me this was particularly striking for the radio-marked woodcock that settled in NY, New England, and New Brunswick; while we had woodcock on eggs in NY and New England in March, our radio-marked NY, ME, and NB-bound birds were still migrating in April. This diversity of migration strategies is an overall good thing for the population; if they all migrated at the same pace along the same routes they could all be susceptible to the same catastrophe – prolonged April snowstorms in New England, for example.

FOLLOW THE AMERICAN WOODCOCK MIGRATION LIVE!

Spring 2016 Migration - Satellite Tags



Movements of the woodcock will be tracked again this fall as long as the transmitters are able to send signals. This study is being conducted by researchers from the University of Minnesota Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit, the University of Arkansas Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit, and the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Division of Migratory Bird Management, with assistance from state agency and RGS/AWS wildlife biologists. For more information, check the RGS website.



RGS Youth Program Activities



This year in the Northeast we will collaborate with partners to put on at least two mentored youth hunter events. As we did last year, this coming August the Ruffed Grouse Society will partner with the Sebasticook Chapter of the North American Versatile Hunting Dog Association (NAVHDA) and the University of Maine 4-H Camp at Bryant Pond (<http://umaine.edu/bryantpond/>) to introduce a dozen youths to upland bird hunting and bird dog handling. The youth participants learn gun safety and shooting skills, along with many outdoor skills, as part of the normal "Sports Afield" program at the 4-H camp. RGS and NAVHDA add the game birds and dog handling aspect to the program.

In July, RGS collaborated with the Yankee Chapter of NAVHDA and other partners to put on a NAVHDA Apprentice Hunter Program event in Maine. The RGS contribution to the weekend was the RGS biologist giving a short talk on grouse and woodcock ecology, and leading campers in hands-on dissections of grouse, woodcock, and

ducks. Each camper also received an RGS blaze orange hat and copies of *A Grouse in the Hand* and *A Woodcock in the Hand* booklets.

Jason Carter and the rest of the Yankee Chapter do a fantastic job on their educational events. In my opinion, keys to the success of these events are: keep it fun, learn by doing, and keep it moving. The Yankee Chapter of NAVHDA provided the following press release and photos of the event.

MEDIA RELEASE

CONTACT: [Jason Carter](#) 207-721-0557

NAVHDA APPRENTICE HUNTER PROGRAM COMPLETES OUTDOOR SKILLS & WINGSHOOTING WEEKEND



Brunswick, Maine – July 27, 2016: Eight youth hunting apprentices, three teen counselors, eight mentors and a crew of volunteers just wrapped up the second annual **NAVHDA Apprentice Hunter Program (NAHP)** camp – a weekend of intense but fun outdoor skills and hunting training. Sponsored by the North American Versatile Hunting Dog Association (NAVHDA) and presented by the **Yankee Chapter of NAVHDA**, the three-day event introduced campers to a variety of skills and experiences integral to successful upland bird hunting and outdoor survival. Camp

activities were held at Merrymeeting Kennels in Brunswick, Varney's Clay Sports in Richmond, and the Green Point Wildlife Management Area in Dresden.

Camp Program Director Jason Carter and Assistant Directors Blaine Carter and Patti Carter led the group through activities ranging from compass reading, fire building, and shelter construction to gun safety, target shooting and upland hunting. Throughout the program, the campers learned to work with versatile hunting dogs, handling them in hunting scenarios and understanding the training and care involved. The campers also enjoyed talks by visiting guest speakers – a Maine game warden, a Maine Search and Rescue Team (handler and canine), a Ruffed Grouse Society biologist, a veterinarian and a Master Maine Guide. The highlight of the NAHP camp weekend was the opportunity for the campers to participate in an actual bird hunt, using pen-raised chukar partridge.

NAHP prides itself on a creative and energetic approach to teaching their campers by designing challenges and games that integrate skills training with fun. Examples: The well-known game “Red Light – Green Light” became a “whoa and go” dog handling challenge. Hands-on grouse and woodcock dissection taught bird anatomy accompanied by game cleaning and preparation. Fire building started with the more difficult flint and tinder method in a challenge to get water boiling in a tin can, then progressed to making fire starter kits out of cotton, Vaseline and empty shot shells.



The mission of the NAVHDA Apprentice Hunter Program (NAHP) is to foster the love of hunting with versatile hunting dogs and to help educate and train young people in a combination of outdoor skills through activities that emphasize the training, hunting and care of hunting dogs; respect and understanding of conservation; and developing hunter ethics, safety and responsibility. Each year, NAHP seeks campers with a strong desire in learning about the outdoors and versatile hunting dogs but who have not had an opportunity to do so. Unlike many for-profit summer camps, NAHP relies on the sponsorship of NAVHDA, NAVHDA's conservation partners – the Ruffed Grouse Society and Pheasants Forever – and generous donations from other sponsors such as the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Ugly Dog Hunting and Bob the Screenprinter.

About NAVHDA

The North American Versatile Hunting Dog Association (NAVHDA) is a nonprofit corporation whose purpose is to foster, promote, and improve the versatile hunting dog breeds in North America; to conserve game by using well trained reliable hunting dogs before and after the shot; and to aid in the prevention of cruelty to animals by

discouraging nonselective and uncontrolled breeding, which produces unwanted and uncared for dogs.

Chapters that are interested in putting on a youth hunt program should contact regional director Tripp Way (trippw@ruffedgrousesociety.org), myself, or Mark Fouts, Director of Member Relations and Outreach (markf@ruffedgrousesociety.org). RGS/AWS is starting a Mentored Youth Hunt Program this year, so there will be resources available to support our youth programs.

Check the NAVHDA website (navhda.org) for a chapter near you; NAVHDA supports youth hunting programs and local NAVHDA chapters may be interested in partnering on activities. There's a lot of overlap in membership between RGS and NAVHDA – many of us are NAVHDA as well as RGS members.

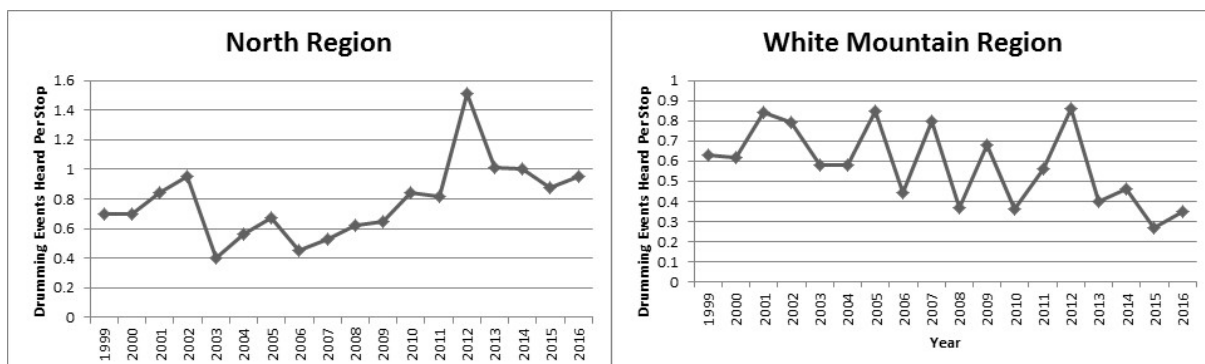
Grouse and Woodcock Outlook

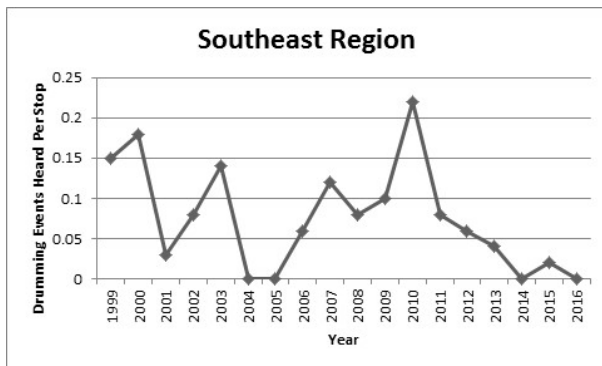
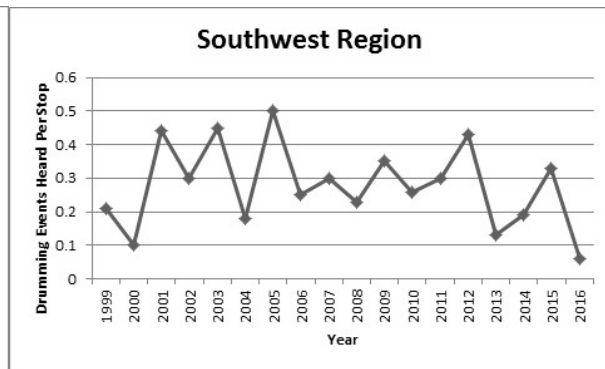
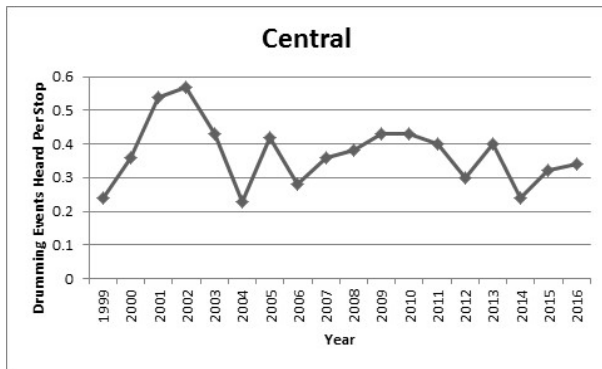
Spring across New York and New England was pretty normal, not unusual weather-wise. An absence of cold, wet weather through June would bode well for nesting and early brood-rearing success for grouse and woodcock.

The American Woodcock Status Report will not be available until later in August, so the results of the range-wide woodcock singing-ground survey are not known at this time. When the status report is released by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, we will post it on the RGS website. Prior year versions are available on the [Woodcock Facts](#) page now.

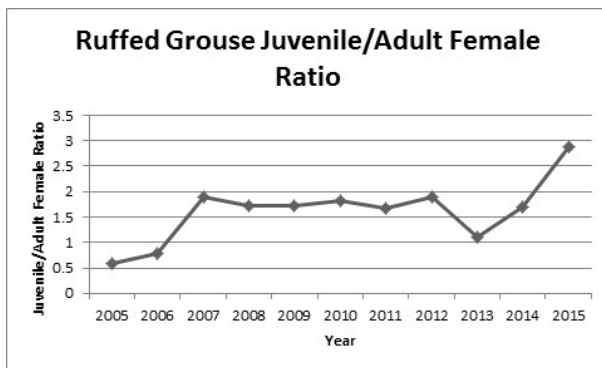
Kelsey Sullivan, upland game bird biologist for Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (MDIFW), noted good spring conditions across the state, and weather perfect for nesting other than a late snowfall in northern Maine, which however melted quickly. The University of Maine and MDIFW run a small number of grouse drumming routes; drums heard per stop this spring were generally on par with last year, with some variation. Sullivan is looking for a fairly average fall grouse-wise, with the local variation one often finds across the state.

Karen Bordeau, upland game bird coordinator for NH Fish and Game, also noted the nice stretch of hatching weather. Drumming surveys were up in the North, White Mountains, and Central regions, and down in the two southern regions of New Hampshire. Bordeau is looking for better than average grouse numbers this fall.





New Hampshire Fish and Game also conducts a grouse wing and tail collection survey to estimate annual productivity (juvenile birds per adult female). Grouse productivity in 2015 was 2.87, the highest since the survey began in 2009.



Again in 2016, NH Fish and Game will be asking ruffed grouse hunters **THROUGHOUT NEW HAMPSHIRE** to help with the survey efforts. As the hunting season approaches watch their website www.WildNH.com for details on where to pick up and drop off your completed packets! You can also call Karen Bordeau at 603-744-5470 for more details. As an incentive for hunters to participate in this wing/tail study, The Ruffed Grouse Society

has generously donated a quality upland game bird gun to be given to a randomly selected participant. The drawing will take place in 2017 after the survey results are summarized.

New York's spring turkey hunter drummer survey results have not yet been finalized. New York experienced the same favorable spring weather conditions as the rest of the Northeast, so we expect a good grouse and woodcock hatch, and the fall forecast for NY should be similar to the rest of the Northeast - better than average.

Connecticut: Mike Gregonis, upland game animal biologist for the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, echoed the favorable weather conditions during the nesting season, and shared observations of grouse broods on state-managed

areas. Seek the best habitat for grouse in CT, such as some areas that have been managed to improve habitat for New England cottontail.

Vermont does not conduct a ruffed grouse survey. Based on regional weather patterns during spring and early summer, grouse production should be above average.

It's Dry: The Effect of Drought on Woodcock

After a spring seemingly favorable to ground nesting birds such as grouse and woodcock, summer thus far into late July has been drier than usual. In fact, the lack of rainfall across many areas of the Northeast has resulted in drought conditions (see maps below). The colors on the map show yellow as “abnormally dry”, beige as “moderate drought”, and orange as “severe drought”.

What affect does this have on woodcock? During normal soil moisture conditions, earthworms are more abundant in hardwood (e.g. alder) stands than under conifers (e.g. spruce and fir), and woodcock preferentially use hardwood stands presumably because of the greater prey availability in these stands; conifer stands are one of the least preferred daytime forest covers.

U.S. Drought Monitor Northeast

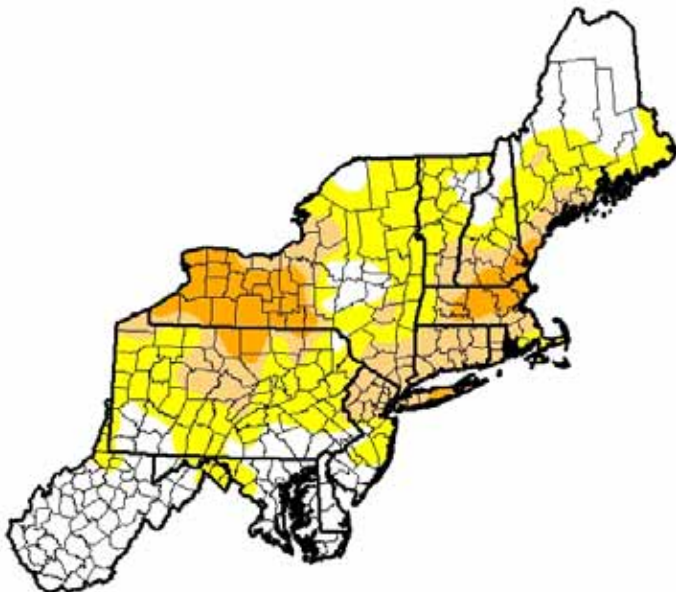
July 26, 2016

(Released Thursday, Jul. 28, 2016)

Valid 8 a.m. EDT

Drought Conditions (Percent Area)

	None	D0-D4	D1-D4	D2-D4	D3-D4	D4
Current	34.19	65.81	29.09	10.10	0.00	0.00
Last Week 2750016	37.54	62.46	25.15	8.60	0.00	0.00
3 Months Ago 4060016	60.97	39.03	5.04	0.00	0.00	0.00
Start of Calendar Year 1203015	62.10	37.90	6.60	0.00	0.00	0.00
Start of Water Year 9290015	42.41	57.59	9.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
One Year Ago 7260015	91.10	8.02	2.25	0.00	0.00	0.00



Intensity

- D0 Abnormally Dry
- D1 Moderate Drought
- D2 Severe Drought
- D3 Extreme Drought
- D4 Exceptional Drought

The Drought Monitor focuses on broad-scale conditions. Local conditions may vary. See accompanying text summary for forecast statements.

Author:

Brad Rippey

U.S. Department of Agriculture



<http://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/>

Research by Greg Sepik and others reported in the 1983 Transactions of the Northeast Section of the Wildlife Society, on woodcock at Moosehorn National Wildlife Refuge in eastern Maine in the late 1970s showed that during summer drought, woodcock shifted habitat use from predominantly hardwood cover to predominantly coniferous cover. They also greatly reduced use of night roost habitats, apparently because it was energetically unfeasible to make the dawn and dusk flights to and from the night roost areas. The authors go on to say "By the end of August all age classes and sexes of woodcock normally have begun to increase in weight (Owen and Krohn 1973). During the last two weeks in August 1978 (the drought year) all woodcock captured were from 5-41% (mean =19%) below the average weights reported by Owen and Krohn (1973) for that period. Licinsky (1972) reported that a 40% weight loss resulted in the death of 2 captive woodcock, thus some woodcock in 1978 may have starved."

Birds typically molt (drop and regrow) their wing feathers annually. This is an energetically and nutritionally demanding process. During the 1978 drought year, Sepik and colleagues found that 3 times as many female woodcock delayed or skipped molting some of their flight feathers, compared to normal, apparently due to a shortage of food in late summer.

An important thing to remember is the 1978 drought referenced in the above study continued through August; precipitation throughout the rest of this summer could greatly alter the severity and pattern of drought.

Upcoming Events in the Region

August 9 Public Information Session: Lowville, NY

Habitat Management Plan for Tug Hill Wildlife Management Area

DEC to Host Public Information Session on Habitat Management Plan for Tug Hill Wildlife Management Area

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) will host a public information session to answer questions from the public and provide information on a recently finalized Habitat Management Plan for Tug Hill Wildlife Management Area (WMA) located in DEC Region 6, Town of Montague, Lewis County. Tug Hill Wildlife Management Area is 5,110 acres and a popular location for hunting, trapping and fishing. "Hunters and trappers seeking wilderness-like experiences have made Tug Hill WMA a popular destination. In fact, trappers come from all over the state to pursue otter, fisher and bobcat," said Judy Drabicki, Region 6 Director.

Habitat Management Plan Goals:

- Manage approximately 76% as intermediate/mature forest to provide habitat for mammals, forest birds/raptors, and wilderness experiences.
- Maintain approximately 14% as wetlands for breeding and migratory stopover habitat for waterfowl and for furbearers.
- Manage approximately 9% of the WMA as young forest (10% of forested area) to promote American woodcock, ruffed grouse, and snowshoe hare.

- Manage approximately 1% as open forest habitat.

DEC will host a public information session on **August 9, 2016 from 6:30 - 8:30 pm** at the following location:

Lowville Sub-Office
DEC Training Room
7327 State Route 812
Lowville, NY 13367-3623
[\(315\) 376-3521](tel:3153763521)

Visit DEC's website to learn more about WMA's and to see the [HMP for Tug Hill WMA](#)

August 27 – 7th Annual Grouse and Woodcock Hunting Workshop, hosted by NH Fish and Game with the Ruffed Grouse Society. 9:00 to noon at the Owl Brook Hunter Education Center, Holderness, NH. The session will be led by grouse hunting enthusiasts/hunter education instructors Sean Williamson and Dan Keleher. Also, Andrew Weik, the Northeast biologist for the Ruffed Grouse Society, will give a presentation on ruffed grouse and woodcock and their habitat needs. **Pre-registration is required. To sign up, call (603) 536-3954.**

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions:
Andy Weik
RGS/AWS Regional Biologist
New York, New England, Louisiana, Eastern Canada
607-793-4832 or andyw@ruffedgrousesociety.org

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.