

Ruffed Grouse Society

Northeast Region



Forest Action Network (F.A.N.) Newsletter ~ Spring 2012

What a winter! No pond ice for skating, no snow cover on the ski trails. But on the plus side the lack of snow and cold means I've got a head start on next year's firewood supply, I spent a lot less time (and gas money) plowing snow, and had good conditions all winter for working the dog in the woods.

All winter I had a nagging question about how "the winter that wasn't" would affect grouse - would the lack of thermal and hiding cover typically provided by deep powder snow be compensated for by more food available for grouse at ground level, and so less time spent vulnerable to hawks and owls while feeding among the tree tops? We'll never know for sure, but one thing I do know is I've heard plenty of drumming activity this spring, and I've heard from many of you who've also noticed the apparent abundance of grouse this spring.

The mild conditions and lack of snow cover across the North allowed woodcock to return to their summer haunts earlier than usual. Woodcock were singing in some parts of New England in February,



and on average I'd estimate they were about three weeks ahead of schedule. In fact, it seems some hardy resident woodcock in coastal portions of southern New England never left for the wintering grounds in the South this year.

Displaying timberdoodles seem at least as abundant this spring as usual, although we'll have to wait for confirmation (or refutation) of this until summer when the results of the annual woodcock singing ground survey are published in the annual woodcock status report put out by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The early spring allowed woodcock to nest substantially earlier than



normal. Whereas peak of the woodcock hatch across the Northeast tends to be in May, there have been many reports this year of nearly-full size woodcock chicks in late April – keeping in mind that the young are full size and independent of the hen at about four weeks. As they say in some areas along the north end of the I-95 corridor: that's **wicked** early! (photo of woodcock nest by J. Carter, Maine)

Weather conditions this spring have been fairly favorable for nesting by woodcock, grouse, and other ground nesters – generally free of prolonged cold, wet weather. One exception was a week of cold snowy weather in April in the Adirondacks (NY) and probably a few other high elevation areas. Dan McAuley, woodcock researcher from Maine with U.S.G.S. Patuxent Wildlife Research Center noted that most radio-marked female woodcock nesting in the Adirondacks lost their nests during that time; it's likely those birds will attempt a second nesting effort. From Dan's earlier research at Moosehorn National Wildlife Refuge in Maine we know that a high proportion of woodcock hens that lose a clutch of eggs to predation, disturbance, foul weather, etc., or even suffer the complete loss of a brood of young chicks, will attempt to nest again in the same season.

We do get an annual measure of woodcock production via a wing collection survey coordinated by USFWS. Every winter after the hunting seasons have ended, about 20 of us woodcock biologists get together to examine woodcock wings (one from each woodcock bagged) sent in by over 1,200 hunters from across the woodcock range in the U.S. who have been tapped to participate in the survey. This year we convened for a few days in Louisiana to determine the age (young of the year vs adult) and gender of over 14,000 wings that were



submitted. From this information a statistic is calculated – number of young woodcock per adult female – that serves as an index of production (a product of number of nesting females, nest success, and survival of chicks), or measure of how well the woodcock population did during last year’s breeding season. If you remember how wet and miserable the weather was last spring, you might expect the production index to be low – fewer than normal young per hen. And you’d be right. The long term average for the survey is 1.8 young per adult female, and the preliminary result for 2011 is 1.37 young per adult female. It could’ve been a lot worse, but woodcock are resilient creatures, possessing a high propensity to renest, and typically having high rates of chick survival.

– *Andy*

Update on Habitat

Ryan Robicheau, lands management forester for Maine DIFW, reported 100 acres of clear cuts this winter to improve habitat for grouse, woodcock, and many other species of wildlife on two state wildlife management areas: Frye Mountain WMA (pictured at right, 40 ac), and Vernon Walker WMA in the towns of Shapleigh (25 ac) and Newfield (35 ac). Habitat improvement cuts are planned for the coming winter on Cobscook Bay WMA, Gordon Manuel WMA (Hodgdon, ME), and Bud Leavitt WMA (Charleston, ME).



Also in Maine, the first allocation from the Maine Drummer Fund was approved for 20 acres of clear cuts on forest within the Downeast Lakes Land Trust based in Grand Lake Stream, ME; the Drummer Fund contribution was matched equally by a grant from the Wildlife Management Institute (host of www.timberdoodle.org). An additional 20 acres are planned to be clear cut this coming winter on this 100-acre grouse and woodcock project site. The management planning for ruffed grouse and woodcock on the property is a cooperative effort between the Land Trust and RGS, with considerable assistance provided by local RGS volunteers.

Nearly 200 acres of clear cuts were performed this winter on Plum Creek’s Fogg Farm in Long Pond Township, ME as the initial harvest to improve habitat on this 1,200 acre forest parcel dedicated to the conservation of grouse and woodcock. Partners on this project include Plum Creek, Wildlife Management Institute, Maine DIFW, U.S. Geological Survey, Natural Resources Conservation

Service, Maine Forest Service, Forest Society of Maine, and the Land Use Regulatory Commission.

On the Steam Mill Brook WMA in Walden, VT, RGS provided forestry supervision during winter 2011 for 44 acres of even-age timber harvests to improve habitat for grouse, woodcock, and snowshoe hare. During spring 2011, we provided a contract forester to oversee the harvest of 21 additional acres to improve grouse and hare habitat at Steam Mill Brook WMA.



Through a cooperative agreement with the Green Mountain National Forest, RGS supported part of the cost of shearing trees to stimulate regrowth on a 38 acre grouse and woodcock project site (photo at left) near the Robert Frost Wayside in Ripton, VT. This project was made possible, in part, through a generous donation from Orvis. Additional cooperative ventures to improve habitat on the Green Mountain NF are planned

for this year.

In New Hampshire, RGS has been working with the Wildlife Management Institute, and we're in the early stages of developing a forest stewardship agreement with the White Mountain NF to improve grouse and woodcock habitat on the national forest, and also in the planning stage of assisting NH Fish and Game on habitat improvement on state WMA land.

In Massachusetts RGS has recently focused on working with two categories of land owners that have often been overlooked in habitat conservation: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and local municipalities (towns). In addition to pursuing habitat improvements on these lands, we're also working with MassWildlife in longer term habitat management planning.

During the past year, thanks in part to a generous donation from Orvis, RGS was able to support CT DEEP Wildlife Division on a 44-acre habitat improvement project at the Housatonic River WMA in Kent, CT. Future RGS support will likely help to improve habitat at the Goshen WMA in Goshen, CT (right photo: first season's aspen growth on Goshen WMA clear cut).



In Rhode Island, the RGS biologist and the RI Habitat Committee conducted preliminary field work and are drafting a proposal to work with RIDEM on a project to improve grouse and woodcock habitat at Arcadia WMA.



RGS has been busy in New York on a number of projects. The Central New York chapter completed another “Project Appleseed” on the Morgan Hill State Forest; about 10 CNY members came out on a drizzly Saturday in April to release (from competition) and prune apple trees (left photo: CNY RGS members on Project Appleseed work day).

On the Three Rivers WMA, the CNY Habitat Committee and I worked with NYS DEC Wildlife Division to complete a 5.5 acre clear cut (right photo) in an aspen-dominated stand this spring. This is the first phase of what we hope will be a long-term habitat management strategy for this portion of the WMA.



CNY RGS members, as part of the Central New York Wildlife Habitat Management Group, also lent their labor to an aspen regeneration cut on Great Swamp Conservancy land in Canastota, NY. This project is one of what will be many habitat improvement demonstration projects in the CNY area.

On the Finger Lakes National Forest, the Triple Flush Chapter and I are working with the Forest Service under a cooperative agreement to implement a regeneration cut this coming winter on national forest land to improve habitat for grouse and woodcock. We’re also working with NYS DEC in regions 7 & 8 to plan habitat improvement projects on state land.

RGS Testifies in Washington to Promote Wildlife Habitat Management on National Forests

Ruffed Grouse Society Wildlife Biologist Gary Zimmer appeared on March 24th before the House of Representatives Subcommittee on Conservation, Energy and Forestry in Washington D.C. The Subcommittee Hearing addressed challenges and opportunities for resource management on National Forests.

The hearing was called by Subcommittee Chairman Glenn Thompson (R-PA) who stated, “The health of our national forests is an issue of vital importance for rural America. Not only are our national forests a source of immense natural beauty, but they provide us with natural resources, recreation opportunities, wildlife habitat, and serve as economic engines for local communities.”

“The Forest Service should always consider the multiple uses of our national forestland including timber production, habitat preservation, natural resource management and recreation and ensure local economic development and environmental protections work in harmony, instead of in competition, with each other,” said Ranking Member Tim Holden (D-PA).

Zimmer testified on the impacts that a reduction in forest management activities on our national forests have had on wildlife populations. Zimmer said, “Periodic forest disturbance is essential to maintain healthy forest ecosystems. In order to maintain the full array of forest wildlife, a landscape must support the full array of forest habitats – forests of various types and various ages.”

“Today, active forest management through the use of commercial timber harvest provides the only realistic opportunity to maintain the range of forest habitats needed to sustain wildlife diversity,” Zimmer declared. “Thick, young forest habitat provides protective cover from predators for many wildlife species that are being negatively impacted by a decline in forest management,” he added.

In his testimony Zimmer highlighted species like the Federally Endangered Kirtland’s warbler, candidate species New England cottontail rabbit, and over 40 species of songbird in the Eastern United States that are considered dependent on young forest habitats. The later list includes the golden-winged warbler, a species recently petitioned for federal listing under the Endangered Species Act. Zimmer stated, “Wildlife that rely upon young forest habitats also include the ruffed grouse and the American woodcock, two important game species pursued by over one million sportsmen and women each year in North America.”

National forests and other public forestlands play a critical role in the conservation of wildlife dependent on young forest habitats. Zimmer declared, “Only through a balanced approach to forest stewardship, an approach that recognizes the ecological necessity of periodic disturbance, today imparted

primarily through commercial forest management, can the needs of our forest wildlife resources be adequately addressed.”

Zimmer continued, “Well-intended laws and regulations including the National Forest Management Act and the National Environmental Policy Act have guided the management of our national forests for many decades but have been used by some to strangle the agency. We must reduce the ability of groups or individuals to tie up habitat management activities for years and years at little cost to them, but at a very high cost to those that live and work in the vicinity of the national forests and to the taxpayers of this great nation.”

Zimmer concluded, “These forests provide some of the last opportunities to maintain essential young forest habitat as an important part of the biodiversity of our national forests and meet the social and economic demands of the public.”

Forest Service Announces Decision to Allow Gun Hunting and Snowmobiling in Contested Areas of the Huron-Manistee National Forests

On January 27, 2012 the U.S. Forest Service released the Record of Decision and the Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement that addresses issues stemming from a lawsuit in federal court over gun hunting and snowmobiling in the Huron-Manistee National Forests.

In summary, the Regional Forester selected Alternative 4 (the Preferred Alternative) as the Selected Alternative. Under the Selected Alternative, the Forest Service will continue to allow gun hunting in the previously designated Semiprimitive Nonmotorized and Primitive areas of the Huron-Manistee National Forests. They will also continue to allow snowmobiling on designated trails within the Huron-Manistee National Forests but will be changing some management area designations in the 2006 Forest Plan.

The Record of Decision and associated documents are posted on the Huron-Manistee National Forests’ website: www.fs.usda.gov/hmnf. For additional information regarding the Record of Decision or the FSEIS, contact the public affairs officer for the Huron-Manistee National Forests, Kenneth Arbogast, at (231) 775-5023, Ext. 8726, or karbogast@fs.fed.us.

We appreciate the support provided by the many RGS members who sent letters and comments to the Forest Service staff on this important issue. An unfavorable ruling may have resulted in similar lawsuits occurring on other national forests.

Upcoming Events in the Region

May 30 – New Chapter Meet & Greet and Habitat Seminar, Watertown, NY. 7:00 pm at Gander Mountain store, 21105 Salmon Run Mall Loop West, Watertown, NY. Contact Tripp Way 607-743-0760

June 3 – Addieville East Farm Shoot to benefit RGS. 100 sporting clays tournament with trophies and a New England lobster dinner. Mapleville, RI. For more information contact Sally Hayter 401-568-3185

June 9 – Nutmeg Chapter Sporting Clays Tournament and Benefit Dinner, Bristol Fish and Game Club, Wolcott, CT. Includes continental breakfast, 100 sporting clay targets with trophies, and full banquet dinner. For more information contact Bob Smith 860-304-1858, nutmegrgs@comcast.net

June 9 – Central New York Chapter Sponsor/Banquet Committee Appreciation Event & Feast. Dewitt Fish and Game Club, Woodchuck Road, Dewitt, NY. Eligible persons will be contacted. Ed Pugliese 315-263-6699, PKA7@aol.com, Norm Webber 315-697-3377, lutherwebb@earthlink.net

July 22 – Central New York Chapter Annual Kadat Sporting Clays Shoot Event. Kadat Sporting Clays Course, Georgetown, NY. Details at event, various groupings and prizes. Sign-up required, contact Ed Pugliese 315-263-6699, PKA7@aol.com

August 5 – Central New York Chapter Fall Brunch & Outing/Sporting Clays Shoot (fun shoot). Shooting 10:00 am – 3:00 pm, lunch at noon. Baldwinsville Rod & Gun Club, Baldwinsville, NY. Contact Norm Webber 315-697-3377, lutherwebb@earthlink.net

August 15 – Central New York Chapter pre-banquet organizational meeting, open to all. 7:00 pm, location TBA. Contact Tim McCarthy 315-430-2122, tmac@twcnny.rr.com

August 16-17 – Coverts Forest Landowner Habitat Workshop, Nakawic, NB. Preregistration required. Contact John Lockerbie 506-451-8996, jlrgrs@nbnet.nb.ca

August 18 – Grouse Hunting Workshop, presented by NH Fish & Game and RGS. 9:00-noon, Owl Brook Hunter Education Center, Holderness, NH. Contact Tom Flynn 603-536-3954

August 25 – Ruffed Grouse and Woodcock Forum, presented by RGS at White Otter Fish & Game Club, Woodgate, NY. Details TBA. Contact Tripp Way 607-743-0760

September 7-9 – Vermont Coverts forest landowner education workshop, Kehoe Conservation Camp, Castleton, VT. Contact Lisa Sausville 802-388-3880, http://www.vtcoverts.org/about_vt_coverts.php

September 9 – David Griskavich Memorial Shoot, hosted by William Harnden Foster Chapter (MA) at Addieville East Farm, Mapleville, RI. Contact Paul Schwalbe 508-726-7253, pschwalb@travelers.com

September 12-16 – New York Master Forest Owner landowner education workshop, Arnot Teaching and Research Forest, Van Etten, NY. I'll be giving the grouse/young forest wildlife presentation on the 13th. For program details see: <http://www2.dnr.cornell.edu/ext/mfo/training.htm>, contact Gary Goff 607-255-2824

September 14 – Nutmeg Chapter Annual Sportsman Banquet. Hawthorne Inn, Berlin, CT. Contact Bob Smith 860-304-1858, nutmegrags@comcast.net

September 15 & 16 – Syracuse Gun Show Table – CNY Chapter display/membership table. Help always welcome! Contact Ed Pugliese 315-263-6699, PKA7@aol.com

October 3-6 – NH Coverts landowner workshop, Greenfield, NH. (due to conflict I won't be instructing this year). Contact Malin Clyde 603-862-2166; for program details see <http://extension.unh.edu/FWT/Coverts.htm>,

November 9 – Central New York Chapter Annual Banquet. 6:00 pm, The Whitetail Restaurant, Chittenango, NY. Details TBA, contact Norm Webber 315-697-3377, lutherwebb@earthlink.net

Enter The RGS 2012 National Raffle Now

The June 29th deadline is quickly approaching for a chance to enter the 2012 RGS National Raffle and help support the organization and possibly win one of three quality shotguns. Information on entering can be found on the following poster. I have a few tickets left; they could be the winning ones!!

RUFFED GROUSE SOCIETY



1961 - 2011
50 Years of
Managing Forest Habitat

DESIGNED BY JOHN C. CLEVER

2011 - 2012

NATIONAL RAFFLE

THREE WINNERS DRAWN JUNE 29, 2012

CONNECTICUT SHOTGUN A-10 AMERICAN DELUXE

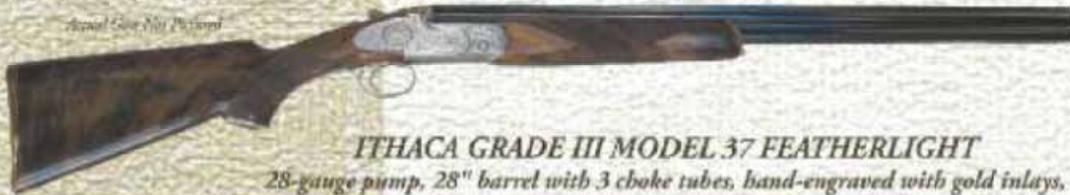
Over-and-under, 20-gauge, 28" barrels with 5 choke tubes, shallow frame, full sidelock with engraved game scenes, straight stock with exhibition grade wood and field forend. Includes combination and key locking case. Retail Value: \$9,400



CAESAR GUERINI RGS UNIQUE APEX GRADE

Over-and-under 28-gauge, 28" barrels with 5 choke tubes, one of a kind, hand-engraved grouse and woodcock design, Prince of Wales stock with exhibition grade wood. "RGS" on trigger guard. Retail Value: \$8,495

Original Grouse and Woodcock



ITHACA GRADE III MODEL 37 FEATHERLIGHT

28-gauge pump, 28" barrel with 3 choke tubes, hand-engraved with gold inlays, gold trigger, fancy AAA grade black walnut stock. Retail Value: \$3,500



Donation for each ticket is \$100. Up to 1,000 tickets to be sold.
Drawing on June 29, 2012 at RGS HQ in Coraopolis, PA. First ticket wins Connecticut, Second ticket wins Guerini, Third ticket wins Ithaca. Winners responsible for applicable taxes.

To purchase raffle tickets, mail coupon to: Andy Weik, Regional Biologist
Ruffed Grouse Society - 794 Adams Road - Dryden, NY 13053
or call 607-844-9656 or e-mail: rgsweik@gmail.com

Name _____ Phone # _____

Mailing Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

____ Tickets @ \$100.00 Each = \$ _____ Total Enclosed Signature _____

Billing Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

CHECK (Payable to RGS) CREDIT CARD # _____ Exp. Date _____

And Don't Forget...

- ✓ to ensure that you continue to receive timely FAN updates please notify me of changes in your email address.
- ✓ check out the RGS website for all things grouse and woodcock at www.ruffedgrousesociety.org , and
- ✓ check out www.timberdoodle.org for a great summary and description of many RGS and other woodcock projects in the Eastern U.S. The website keeps growing as the Wildlife Management Institute (via Chuck Fergus) continues to compile info about woodcock, grouse and songbird habitat.

Thanks for your generosity, enthusiasm, and support! If you have any questions or ideas you want to discuss, please don't hesitate to contact me
- *Andy*

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