



Northeast Region

FAN UPDATE Fall 2014

Are you ready?

Tomato plants have called it quits, songbirds are heading south, and the first frost has tinged my lawn – bird season is upon us! Now we're looking forward to visiting our favorite coverts and discovering new ones, a pup's first point, an old dog's last hurrah, a beginning hunter's new-found passion that is grouse and woodcock hunting, and spending autumn days in the woods with friends, canine and human.

Grouse season started September 20th in New York's north zone, and woodcock seasons kick in on October 1st in several states. Grouse food has been abundant this summer – good berry crops on the dogwoods, viburnums, hawthorn, grapes, raspberry and blackberry, (and that invasive autumn olive) and hit or miss on wild apples. I've seen few if any beech nuts – we had a big crop last year – but the acorn production seems widespread across the Northeast. The table is set.

Ready or not, bird season is here! Safe travels, good hunting, and may you make some great memories this fall.

– *Andy*

AMERICAN WOODCOCK POPULATION STATUS, 2014

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Abstract: American Woodcock Singing-ground Survey data for 2014 indicate that the index for singing American woodcock (*Scolopax minor*) males in the Eastern Management Region was not significantly different from 2013; while there was a significant decline of 7.3% in the Central Management Region. There was a significant declining 10-year trend for woodcock heard in both Management Regions during 2004-14. This marks first time in 10 years that there has been a declining 10-year trend in the Eastern Management Region and the first time in 3 years there has been a declining 10-year trend in the Central Management Region. Both regions have a significant, long-term (1968-14) declining trend (-1.0%/year for the Eastern Management Region and -0.9%/year for the Central Management Region). The 2013 recruitment index for the U.S. portion of the Eastern Region (1.60 immatures per adult female) was 3.2% less than the 2012 index and 2.3% less than the long-term regional index, while the recruitment index for the U.S. portion of the Central Region (1.54 immatures per adult female) was 7.2% less than the 2012 index and was 1.4% less than the long-term regional index. Estimates from the Harvest Information Program indicated that U.S. woodcock hunters in the Eastern Region spent 136,700 days afield and harvested 62,500 woodcock during the 2013-14 season, while in the Central Region, hunters spent 306,100 days afield and harvested 180,600 woodcock.

Andy's Note: Woodcock numbers in 2014 remained fairly close to 2013 levels across New York, New England, and the Maritimes, but significantly down over the past decade for the Eastern Region. High note: Hmmm, reaching here, but I think this year's weather during nesting and brood-rearing, generally speaking, was pretty good for recruiting more woodcock into the fall flight. Low note: the woodcock survey index in Massachusetts this spring was the lowest since the survey began in the 1960s (we said the same thing last two years...), and this year's counts were also all-time lows in Maine, Quebec, and Vermont. The entire report can be viewed at <http://www.fws.gov/migratorybirds/NewReportsPublications/PopulationStatus.html>

Despite generally fair spring and summer weather, I've heard tell of pockets of summer drought in Quebec and Maine from bird dog people having a little trouble turning up woodcock. So, if the typical hardwood feeding coverts are especially dry where you hunt check the conifer coverts – spruce-fir thickets – or get right down to the wet swamp edges to find woodcock. Hardwood stands are normally better habitat for woodcock food, but when it gets dry the soils in those hardwood feeding coverts dry out and worms and other delectable items become unavailable. However the soil under conifer stands holds moisture better, and even if the feeding isn't great it's still better than in the desiccated soil of a hardwood covert.

The grouse outlook this year isn't half bad – fair numbers of drummers across the region, combined with generally fair weather (there were local exceptions back in May & June, as always) have resulted in widespread reports of numerous broods and good

brood sizes, from New York to Maine. I'm pretty optimistic that we'll see improvement over last grouse season.

Update on Tug Hill WMA (NY) – Planning the Plan

As you may recall the folks at NYS Department of Environmental Conservation thoughtfully considered your comments regarding future management of the Tug Hill Wildlife Management Area (WMA) in northern NY, and responded by inviting your regional biologist (me) to assist the NYS DEC Biologists in Region 6 in drafting a forest management plan that will do what many of you asked – improve significant amounts of forest for grouse, woodcock, snowshoe hares, and numerous other species of wildlife.

To that end, I spent a day last spring with two Region 6 biologists in the office going over forest inventory maps as a first step in a landscape analysis of the WMA. We will be getting together again soon to work on the next step in charting a course for timber harvests designed to improve habitat over the next few decades. I'll keep you posted.

Bird Hunting Opportunities to Support RGS

Come join the **3rd Annual NY Grouse and Woodcock Benefit Hunt** October 17-19,



2014 based at On The Wing Grouse Camp in Ellenburg, NY in the northern Adirondacks. This is a two-day guided hunt - Saturday and Sunday - and includes a banquet dinner. Hunter numbers are limited to 26. For more information contact Bruce Bennett 413-237-1054 (bbennett82@comcast.net) or Tripp Way.

Also, check out the Upland Bird Hunt in the PA Wilds November 6 to November 8, 2014, based out of The Red Fern, Kersey, PA.

Contact: Mary 814-512-2101 or wlab@windstream.net

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 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, 2014**, check the following website for locations:

http://www.wildlife.state.nh.us/Hunting/hunt_ruffed_grouse_survey.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, N.H. 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 **2014-15 Ruffed Grouse and American Woodcock Hunting Log (PDF)** (621 kB), 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: fwwildlf@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). 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



How 'Bout Dem Yoots?

Yes, what's going on with youth programs and activities? Well, I've had a few preliminary conversations with potential partners on youth activities to promote conservation and hunting skills for the younger crowd. One such group is the 4-H Shooting Sports program (ME and NY so far). Our plan is to offer a program on grouse ecology and hunting within the Shooting Sports program at a couple 4-H



conservation camps in summer of 2015. The key component will be the hands-on dissection and study of ruffed grouse, modeled after the successful Pennsylvania Drummers Leadership Academy (see article on PA Drummers in Fall 2014 RGS magazine).

(photo: Mark Banker, then RGS senior wildlife biologist, teaches PA Drummers youth how to sex and age Ruffed Grouse.)

Want to help? We need grouse – whole (dead) ruffed grouse in good condition. If you can spare one this fall, let it cool and wrap it up nicely, seal in a bag or freezer paper, tuck it into the freezer and call or email me (andyw@ruffedgrousesociety.org). At this point we're shooting for about a dozen birds. Thanks!

What's Bruin on the Ballot in Maine – NO on 1!

The anti-hunting lobby has been active in Maine, again trying to shut down the state's bear hunting season. The issue will be decided at the ballot on November 4th. If you think this is just about bear hunting, think again. It's about hunting, hunting with dogs, and science-based wildlife management. So, yes, it's about grouse and woodcock hunting, too.

The campaign to save bear hunting and defeat the anti-hunting lobby has entered its final phase. The Humane Society of the United States has already spent nearly \$1.3 million on TV; the Maine Wildlife Conservation Council is raising funds to counter the HSUS anti-hunting message. Contributions however large or small may be mailed (and payable) to: Maine Wildlife Conservation Council, 205 Church Hill Rd., Augusta, ME 04330. For more information: www.savemainebearhunt.com Don Kleiner, treasurer.

Rhode Island: the Cut is On!

In April 2013 I spent two days helping Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management state gamebird biologist (one of a dozen hats he wears) Brian Tefft on a timber inventory and lay-out of a 60-acre stand in preparation for a habitat improvement project on the Nicholas Farm Wildlife Management Area in Coventry, RI. I recently received the good news from Brian that the timber sale is being conducted and the stand is being harvested as I write this. Fantastic! Thank you, Brian, for your perseverance and dedication to exemplary wildlife management. I'm looking forward to walking this stand as it regenerates into habitat for grouse, cottontails, and many other species. And I'll be sure to bring along tick repellent!

New York Receives Habitat Machine

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation recently took ownership of a tracked forestry machine with mulching head to conduct shrub and young forest grouse and woodcock habitat improvement projects on state controlled lands.



The ASV PT-100 loader with Fecon mulching head is a gift from RGS to NYSDEC for use on habitat improvement treatments. It had previously been used and stationed in Michigan. The ASV PT-100 is ideal for cutting shrubs or small trees such as alders to regenerate these stands and rejuvenate habitat.

We are looking forward to our first Drummer Fund project on which this machine will be used!

Charter Memberships Available to the American Woodcock Society

Those who join the newly formed American Woodcock Society (AWS) through January 30, 2015 will become an AWS Charter Member, a special group who joined AWS during its inaugural year. Charter members receive a commemorative decal, patch and certificate to proudly display. To join, contact the membership department by toll free phone at 888-564-6747.

Also new or renewing members can join both RGS and AWS as a dual member for the discounted rate of \$60 (regular \$35 for each or \$180 for three years).

Help RGS & AWS Increase Support for Habitat and Hunting

Participate in the RGS and AWS Member-Get-A-Member Campaign – Help us increase support for habitat and hunting – recruit a fellow grouse or woodcock hunter to become a member and both current and new members receive a \$20 Orvis gift card. The participating current member is also placed in a drawing for a chance to create habitat by contributing additional funds to the state Drummer Fund of the winner's choice. To participate, see the rules and regulations at <http://www.ruffedgrousesociety.org/201408%20Drive>.

Upcoming RGS Events in the Region

October 17-19 – NY Grouse and Woodcock Benefit Hunt, Malone, NY. Contact Bruce Bennett at 413-237-1054 or Tripp Way for info.

October 24 – 34th Annual Central New York Chapter Conservation & Sportsmen's Banquet, Genesee Grande Hotel, 1060 East Genesee Street, Syracuse, NY. Contact Bob Papworth at 315-471-0914 or Tim McCarthy at 315-696-8987 for info.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions and notify me of any email address changes:

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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.