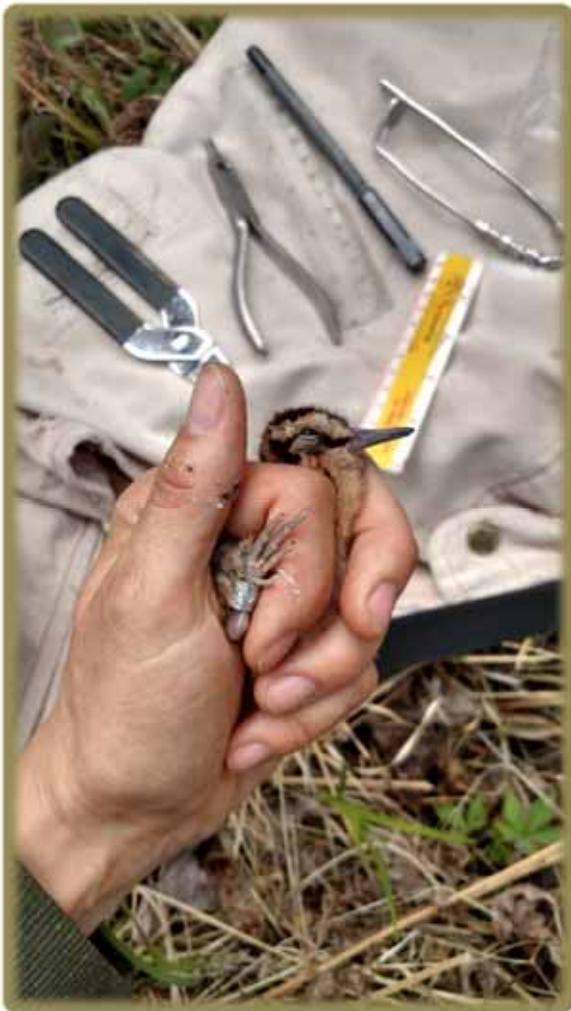


# Ruff Country News Minnesota

*Summer Edition July 2016*

*Meadow Kouffeld-Hansen and Ted Dick*

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*A two day old woodcock chick receives a leg band.*

Warm weather is here again and chicks are in the woods! The seasonality of Minnesota keeps things interesting and defines the rhythm of life. I love this about our great state and I anticipate each season change with great excitement for the activities that come next. Ted and I have been busy since the last newsletter and are looking forward to the rest of 2016 with great anticipation. In this edition of the newsletter, we will cover some of the highlights of the past couple months including the results for the 2016 drumming survey, current education programs, new habitat and acquisition projects, and other information gems. We hope that you enjoy it and maybe we will see you between now and fall at some of the planned events including the Fun Shoots, the Game Fair, or one of the Birds and Brews events (see end of newsletter for more detail). Until then we hope you get some time in the field to prep your favorite four-legged partners for the upcoming fall. There should be more birds out there!

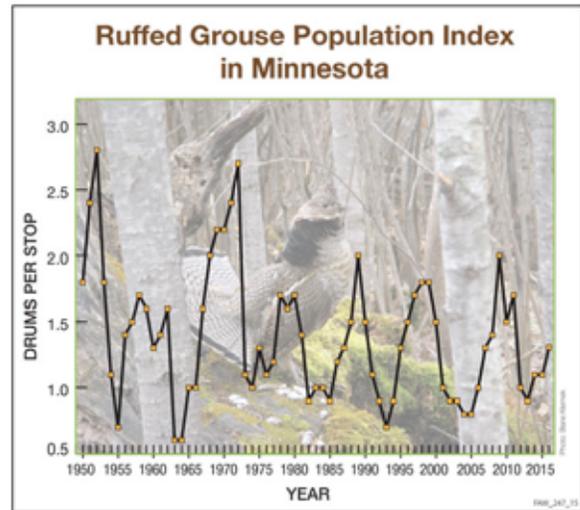
**Message from Meadow Kouffeld-Hansen,  
RGS Regional Biologist**

## 2016 Minnesota Drumming Survey Results

Drumming counts were up this year in Minnesota! Mean drums per stop were up 18% (1.3 drums per stop, Minnesota DNR 2016). This uptick was expected based on the upward point in the 10-year population cycle. All zones had an increased number of drums per stop compared to previous years.

The Minnesota DNR coordinates the annual drumming surveys that take place April-May each year. The spring drumming surveys have been a continuous effort since the mid-1930's with minor modifications since the beginning (e.g. increasing the number of routes during the 1970's and early 80's). Although not an exact count, drumming surveys provide an index of grouse populations. In combination with hunter harvest statistics, drumming surveys help provide some indication as to

where the grouse population is headed in the observed 10-year cycle.



If you are interested in the full report: [http://files.dnr.state.mn.us/recreation/hunting/grouse/grouse\\_survey\\_report16.pdf](http://files.dnr.state.mn.us/recreation/hunting/grouse/grouse_survey_report16.pdf).

## Update: 2016 Women's Intro to Wingshooting Grand Rapids, MN

The first Women's Intro to Wingshooting course is being held in Grand Rapids, MN. Fifteen ladies in Northern Minnesota enrolled and have gone through several class meetings learning about the North American Model for Wildlife Management, North American Game Birds, Shotgun Basics, Cleaning and Handling and of course shooting clays! Some of the ladies had never shot a gun before the course. Despite poor weather for the first two shoots, the women in the course are very excited about shooting and all are celebrating their successes. Some pretty impressive scores came out of the second and third shooting classes and we expect that they will continue

to improve through September. The course culmination will take place in September at a pheasant preserve where ladies will get the chance to hunt with guides and their dogs.

The WIW course is funded by the MN DNR Angler and Hunter Recruitment and Retention Grant, a grant from the Torstenson Foundation, local sponsors including Grand Rapids State Bank, Sandstrom's Distributing, First State Bank of Bigfork, Powell's Excavating and Tree Service, Minnesota Deer Hunter's Association, L&M Fleet Supply, Sawmill Inn, and Itasca Community Education and funding from the Ruffed Grouse Society.



*Wayne Jacobson coaches Carolyn Schmidt.*

## RGS/MDHA Receive \$3.6 Million to Protect Forest Habitat!

The 2016 round of Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage grants was historic for Minnesota grouse and woodcock hunters and the Ruffed Grouse Society. RGS and the Minnesota Deer Hunters Association (MDHA) received **\$3.6 million** to protect forest habitat in Cass and Hubbard Counties. This is one of the largest projects ever for RGS in MN.

The goal of the project is to acquire quality parcels of forest habitat in the two counties and turn them over to the County Land Management Departments for ongoing timber

management with public access. As you've probably heard over the past few years, forested habitat along the forest-prairie transition zone has been disappearing at an alarming rate.

Efforts to preserve wildlands recently have focused on the prairie portions of the State and wetlands have also been targeted, but the transition zone forests, particularly around Park Rapids, are important to grouse and woodcock hunters. Development and conversion to agriculture have put this prime

bird habitat at risk. Coincidentally, recent economic changes have caused timber companies to divest of most or all of their significant land holdings. Hunters are often not aware how much of their favorite “public” hunting land was actually timber company land until its gets leased and/or posted.

Our grant was one of the larger Lessard proposals approved in the forest zone this year but RGS and MDHA have an even bigger one in the pipeline for next spring. This newer proposal, which has already received unanimous county board approval, is in St. Louis County. The request for this project is approximately \$8 million.

The new RGS/MDHA partnership gives us the staff and resources to take on these larger

projects and partnering creates a powerful advocacy group concerned with protecting the habitat we care so much about. Member support has been strong but word of this project has not travelled far enough yet-please let fellow grouse hunters know about these important projects.

We’ve spoken to hunters who said this is the most important work groups like RGS and MDHA can be involved in. And in this day and age, protecting the land and the habitat is a critical part of the mission of RGS: healthy forests, abundant wildlife, sporting traditions. Grouse hunting in Minnesota is a public land sport and we want to keep the public land accessible and healthy for grouse and woodcock hunters now and for generations to come.

## RGS/AWS Working with USFWS on Twin Cities Woodcock Habitat Project



*Singing ground/wildlife opening near the proposed RGS/USFWS young forest project site near Carver MN.*

A great new woodcock project is taking shape right in the **Twin Cities Metropolitan Area**. RGS/AWS and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) are partnering to create improved young forest habitat along the Minnesota River on the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge near Carver. “Tom Cooper of the USFWS and I were leading a woodcock tour in April when we got to talking about ways we could improve the habitat for woodcock right where we were walking” said Ted Dick, DNR Forest Game Bird Coordinator. Not only will this site improve habitat for woodcock and other young forest species, one additional benefit will be that it will be used for educational tours and there is discussion of a kiosk installation to highlight the purpose and need for this type of work all along the woodcock migratory route. RGS/AWS will be

able to bring media people here and showcase what RGS/AWS and USFWS have done to enhance habitat for the many species that need young forest habitat. Funding for this

cooperative project will come from the MN Conservation Partner's Legacy Grant Program with RGS Drummer Funds used as a match.

### RGS Staffers Attend Woodcock Banding Clinic in Minnesota



*Terry Petro with his Fannie and Meine (Kouffeld-Hansen) handling a brood.*

Pineridge Grouse Camp of Remer, MN hosted an American Woodcock banding clinic for hopeful woodcock banders up to those that are experienced banders. The three day event was an enjoyable experience with good food, drink and company punctuating interesting and informative lecture, demonstration, dog work and hands-on field experience. Several RGS/AWS staff members had their dogs certified by demonstrating their steadiness in

several very tempting pigeon scenarios. English pointers, Deutsch-Drahthaars, Kleine (small) Munsterlanders, Gordon setters, and English setters were present and participated. Afterward less experienced banders/trainees headed out with experienced banders to search for woodcock broods. Everyone was fortunate enough to get their hands on real woodcock chicks and place bands on them. It is sure to be a new favorite spring activity that

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involves good grouse and woodcock dogs and hands-on experience with the birds we love so much. Band recovery data can provide some very important information on migratory

corridors, brood-rearing habitat and a myriad of other interesting info. If you have a chance to attend next year, you won't be disappointed!



*Two day-old woodcock brood*

## Latest RGS Efforts in Pine County Nearing Completion



*Installing gates like this one will be the final step in the designation of 45 miles of new Grouse and Woodcock Hunter Walking Trails in Pine County.*

It's been a lengthy process, but come this fall grouse and woodcock hunters interested in

hunting the east central part of Minnesota will have **45 new miles of non-motorized trails**

to access the coverts of Pine County. Minnesota has an abundance of grouse and woodcock hunting opportunity but there are generally fewer options closer to the Twin Cities: Pine County is one exception with multiple areas offering good hunting.

The length of the process was unusual. The State Forest land trails in Pine County were some of the last to receive their ATV classifications. If you recall, we asked RGS members back in 2011 to get involved in the designation process. Many RGS members wrote letters or emails or attended the public input meetings. The result is that we now

have new non-motorized recreational trails for pursuits like grouse and woodcock hunting. RGS MN Drummer Funds will be used in part to purchase the gates. We are also looking for some volunteers to help install the gates so, if you're interested, contact Ted Dick (contact info at end of newsletter). We will continue with efforts to supply more hunting opportunities in Pine County and will assist the DNR with projects like expanding or improving parking areas at trailheads and we'll be sure to put up RGS signs so non-members will see what RGS is doing for recreational users. Thank you for supporting this effort and assisting with your input.

### Young Forest Initiative Meeting

On May 5<sup>th</sup>, agency and organization representatives met at the Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge, northwest of Elk River, to identify ways that participants can work collectively to address young forest habitat needs at multiple scales, cover types and ownerships to ensure adequate young forest habitat in Minnesota. At the meeting participants discussed their agency or organization's current forest management activities that pertain to young forest habitat. There have been several attempts in the past to organize a young forest initiative in Minnesota. This meeting was the latest and group members are dedicated to keeping the ball rolling. The effort cannot fall on one individual or organization alone. In

attendance: Tom Cooper and Neil Power of the USFWS, Dave Olfelt and Patti Thielen of the Minnesota DNR, Rat Rubles and Bob Tomlinson of the Wildlife Management Institute, Peter Dieser of the American Bird Conservancy, Meadow Kouffeld-Hansen of the Ruffed Grouse Society and American Woodcock Society, Craig Engwall of the Minnesota Deer Hunters Association, Jim Manolis of The Nature Conservancy, Dick Moore of the Minnesota Association of County Land Commissioners, Tod Tisler of the United States Forest Service, Kathleen Preece of the Minnesota Forest Resources Council, and Jerry Neimi of the Natural Resources Research Institute in Duluth.

## Woodcock Walks hosted by Metro Area RGS



*Participants in the 2016 north Metro woodcock walk wait for the show to begin on the edge of a singing ground.*

Spring in Minnesota is a glorious and long drawn out process. One of the first birds to return to our wonderful state after the deep freeze is the beloved American woodcock. In

2016 the Twin Cities Chapter of the Ruffed Grouse Society hosted two woodcock walks; one in the south Metro and one in the north Metro. Both events were well attended and showcased very cooperative male woodcock that provided quite a show for participants.

To hear and observe the woodcock flight display is one of life's great pleasures and to be able to share the event with someone who has never witnessed it before is even more satisfying. Ted Dick lead both walks with the assistance of other professionals and RGS chapter members. These events have gone on for a few consecutive years and it is hoped that it continues.

## RGS Hunter Mentor Program Seeks Volunteers!



Do you care about the future of hunting in North America? Do you know the importance of hunter recruitment, retention, and reactivation in securing the future of hunting in North America? You can help make a difference and the time to do so is now! Mark Fouts, director of member relations and

outreach, is launching the 2016 Ruffed Grouse Society Hunter Mentor program. The biggest hurdle to making this program a success hinges on volunteer mentors. Volunteers really make programs like this happen. The Hunter Mentor program consists of several half day meetings and a half day hunt. Mentors need

only attend one of the half day meetings prior to the hunt. In addition to the Hunter Mentor program volunteers, we are seeking chapter coordinators to assist in recruiting individuals interested in grouse and woodcock hunting as well as coordinating the course for their respective chapter. If you are interested in

participating in the Hunter Mentor program please take a moment to contact:

Mark Fouts

Ruffed Grouse Society

[MarkF@ruffedgrousesociety.org](mailto:MarkF@ruffedgrousesociety.org)

715-399-2270

## Another RGS Woodcock Project in Itasca and Cass Counties



*Jerry Snetsinger mowing habitat in Cass County*

RGS/AWS is proud to be involved in another woodcock project in Cass and Itasca Counties. This Conservation Partners Legacy (CPL) project involves mowing woodcock roosting areas for improved habitat.

Woodcock move around from nesting areas, to feeding areas, to roosting habitat and prefer open areas with relatively short vegetation for roosting-probably so they can detect predators coming from any direction more easily. Jerry Snetsinger, an RGS committee member from the Grand Rapids chapter, contracted the mowing work for the first phase in late June. The three sites mowed so far are on three different

ownerships so we have cooperation on this project from Itasca County on the Figure Eight Lake site, the MN DNR on the Mud Goose WMA site, and the Chippewa National Forest on a site west of Remer, MN. Many of you may know Jerry from his involvement in the National Grouse and Woodcock Hunt or particularly as a leader of the Under Broken Wings program - he and other members of the Grand Rapids Chapter are hardworking volunteers who excel at engaging their local community with grouse mentoring and hunting improvement. Thank you very much to Jerry and the rest of the Grand Rapids MN Chapter!

As a side benefit, we are coordinating this mowing with a DNR Wildlife assessment project. Dr. Lindsey Shartell is conducting research on wildlife openings use and preference by woodcock and other species. Her field teams surveyed these sites for occupancy before the mowing and will survey again to compare the use of mowed and un-mowed sites. This will give RGS and land managers useful data on the effectiveness of this management technique.



*Jerry Snetsinger and the trap demo dog*

## Southeastern Minnesota Driftless Area Focus: Update

We've mentioned it before but we are excited to mention again that the interstate Driftless Region Forest Symposium, organized by RGS/AWS, is scheduled for August 16-17 in LaCrosse, Wisconsin. This multi-state meeting will bring together resource managers and non-governmental organizations to

discuss issues, challenges and opportunities to bring back improved forest resilience and species diversity by reintroducing some disturbance to these expansive forested areas of Southeast Minnesota, Southwest Wisconsin, Northwest Illinois and Northeast Iowa.

## Thank You!

RGS/AWS will continue to work to improve our forests for ruffed grouse and woodcock as well as promote the future of hunting.

RGS/AWS Minnesota has too much to mention in one newsletter, but look for Meadow or Ted at upcoming events including the **Rum River RGS Fun Shoot** at Wings North in Pine City on July 30, at the **Brainerd Banquet** on August 2, possibly

at another **Birds and Brew** event in St. Paul, and possibly at **Game Fair** (we're trying to line up a grouse presentation there each day) to discuss habitat activities and hunting issues. If you want us to come have a meeting with your local RGS/AWS chapter, just give us a call.

In addition to the \$8 million St. Louis County acquisition RGS and MDHA are proposing, we are planning more large CPL

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grant proposals including alder/willow vegetation management on the North Shore, also near Park Rapids, Longville, Grand Rapids and other locations. We are also working on some cooperative projects with the Chippewa and Superior National Forests.

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 Meadow Kouffeld-Hansen. The work we put in today will benefit our children tomorrow and it is support from people like you, our members, which 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).*