



# News From the Drumming Log

## Winter 2009

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## National News

### Have you seen us lately?

#### *Brand New Website Generates Growing Interest*

RGS recently launched a complete revision of our website, [www.ruffedgrousesociety.org](http://www.ruffedgrousesociety.org). News updates, regional sporting events, exciting raffles and detailed information about habitat work are now in a format that is easier to read, navigate and explore. Great RGS merchandise, along with special deals on high-end shotguns, are available by clicking the "Shop RGS" tab on the homepage. Check us out today – and take your grouse hunting to the next level.

### Centurion Member Wins Kimber

Charles Hulbert of Tewksbury, Massachusetts recently became a Centurion member and won a Kimber Valier Grade II shotgun.

For every 10 new Centurions that join the Ruffed Grouse Society a raffle is held and a Kimber – or comparable shotgun – is awarded to the winner. To learn about becoming a Centurion, which begins at the \$1,000 donation level, call our membership department at 412-262-4044.

### 2010 National Raffle

*Win a Model 21 "Baby Frame" 28-Gauge Shotgun the shotgun made famous by Winchester built by CT Shotguns.*

This one of a kind gun features 28" barrels, choked IC/M with two beads, a straight English stock crafted from AAA fancy feathercrotch walnut to a checkered butt, and a 14 ½" LOP. The approximate retail value is \$32,000.

If you're interested in a chance to win this gun, tickets are \$100.00 and can be purchased through your local Regional Director or by contacting RGS headquarters at 412-262-4044. Up to 1,500 tickets will be sold.

Last year's National Raffle winner, James Farrell, won the upland bird dream hunt, which included attending the National Grouse and Woodcock Hunt in Grand Rapids, Minnesota this past October.

## **New England Wildlife Biologist Joins RGS Team**

Andrew P. Weik joined the Ruffed Grouse Society (RGS) as New England regional wildlife biologist, and will begin his work in the new year. Weik will be responsible for implementing on-the-ground forest management, landowner and land manager education programs throughout New England.

Weik's extensive experience includes five years with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) Northeast Region at Moosehorn National Wildlife Refuge. Moosehorn is the only national wildlife refuge dedicated to woodcock management. His work at Moosehorn, along with his lengthy work history in various wildlife programs, makes Weik a superior fit for the RGS position.

One specific project that Weik hopes to see through to conclusion this year is the revision of the RGS publication, "A Woodcock in the Hand" (Sepik, 1994). The booklet is unique in that it details tips on examining, aging, and sexing American woodcock as well as information on population monitoring and conservation. Though currently out of print, the need and interest in the booklet have not waned.

## **RD Message**

I'd like to wish everyone a wonderful and joyous holiday season and happy new year! These past 5 months have gone by really quickly. I have enjoyed meeting and working with all of the chapters and I appreciate all of the assistance and team spirit afforded me by all of the great volunteers across our region. We all know the conditions we are working under in these tough economic times. Who doesn't know Michigan leads the nation in unemployment and economic woes. What most folks don't know is that our volunteer spirit and commitment to natural resources and our hunting heritage have not waned.

I am happy to report that the recent trend in our banquets is encouraging. The particulars are little different for each event but the trend is with proper management (cost containment, aggressive tickets sales) we are holding our own and in most cases showing modest gains in net dollars and net dollars per attendee. This is critical as these times put extra stress on resource management and our work nationally and locally is more important than ever.

Just as we are coming up with new tools to accomplish our habitat work such as our ASV forestry machine we need to develop new tools to raise the funds that fuel our conservation work. We are looking towards some new type of events such as major fundraisers with high dollar (\$500/plate) events targeting a smaller previously untapped part of our community. We are also incorporating our Board of Directors to host intimate "Dine with a Sportsman" or Wine and Cheese Parties. We are looking to work with some of the bigger hunt clubs to host special parties for their membership and raise awareness and dollars for the RGS mission.

Another change we will be instituting in 2010 is a major emphasis on membership and attendance numbers. An increase in membership will ensure our success, assist us in securing grants, increase advertising rates and give us a bigger pool of potential volunteers, donors, and future leaders. To accomplish this we will now require that all banquet attendees become RGS members. We will be offering a new family membership where each family member becomes a member with one magazine going out to the family. Instead of \$25 each for all family members attending an event the cost will be \$40 and cover all family members. Those attending will also need to pay for their dinner. Hopefully this will lead to an increase in attendance as well membership numbers. We need to emphasize the cost savings and benefits to the family membership as we solicit attendees to our events.

RGS will be budgeting money for projects and that chapters with successful events will be able to keep some of what they raise in a "Drummer Fund" for statewide projects.

All of these new ideas will dovetail with our current banquet fundraisers and allow us to fund more projects nationally and locally through our chapters working to raise the funds. Stay tuned for more news and please share any new ideas you may have as we meet to start the planning for our 2010 banquet season.

We will be having our State Workshop and Leadership meeting Saturday 30 January 2010 at the Ralph A. MacMullen Center at Higgins Lake as in years past. This next meeting will be a chance to create some leadership teams/committees to move our agenda forward and accomplish our lofty and noble goals. Please join us and bring a friend and your ideas for the future!

## Chapter News

We have had many chapters performing many exciting and beneficial activities across our state. These efforts have not gone un-noticed. The RGS Gun Dog of the Year trial was featured on Michigan Out-of-Doors TV. This event was the culmination of numerous qualifying local dog trials. The Ruffed Grouse Society values were highlighted illustrating the strength of our volunteer core and passion for our dogs, resources and hunting. Thanks and congratulations to all of the chapters that participated and especially to the Le Grande Traverse Chapter that hosted and coordinated the event held the morning after their annual fundraiser dinner in Traverse City.

All of the work done on habitat projects such as the work in the Muskegon State Forest by our West Michigan Lakeshore Chapter in Muskegon and the Andy Ammann Chapter 's work in the Rose Lake Recreation Area outside of Lansing are being noticed and appreciated by many statewide. The dedication to our youth demonstrated by chapters such as the Robert J Lytle Chapter in Imlay City and The Southwest MI Chapter in Kalamazoo, the Saginaw Valley Chapter in Saginaw, the Eastern Upper Peninsula Chapter in St. Ignace, and the Andy Ammann Chapter in Lansing is helping to recruit, educate, and engage youth across the state. These are certainly not the only chapters and activities occurring but are examples of what is being accomplished by the RGS Team.

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources(MDNR) Wildlife Division is going to highlight partnerships with private conservation groups working with youth activities and our RGS chapters will be recognized and posted on the MDNR webpage.

Congratulations and thanks to all of you making things better for our resources, and our future.

## Conservation News

We continue to move forward with our ASV Forestry machine. Volunteer John Paige of Imlay City has kept both himself and the machine very busy doing habitat work across the state. The ASV has logged 127.9 hours on approximately 125 acres of habitat. Public land work has been the mainstay with 100.6 hours and 99 acres, and private lands work totaling 27.3 hours and 26.0 acres.

We are planning a travel route for work and the machine should be in the northern tier of the lower peninsula during the winter months doing work on private and public lands. We will be producing a demonstration CD for promotion purposes.

Please contact John Paige [jhpaige@chartermi.net](mailto:jhpaige@chartermi.net), 810-938-0560 with any questions or work related issues with the ASV

The following are two reports/requests from the MDNR that are meant to educate us and call us to action. Let's make our voices heard for grouse, woodcock, and early successional forests.

Michigan Department of Natural Resources  
Wildlife Report No.3504  
September 2009

## **RUFFED GROUSE AND AMERICAN WOODCOCK STATUS IN MICHIGAN, 2009**

**Valerie R. Frawley and C. Alan Stewart**

### **ABSTRACT**

Hunter cooperator surveys, spring breeding surveys, and mail harvest surveys are conducted each year to monitor ruffed grouse (*Bonasa umbellus*) and American woodcock (*Scolopax minor*) populations. Yearly data comparisons are described for hunter cooperator surveys (2007-2008), spring breeding surveys (2008-2009), and mail harvest surveys (2006-2007). Hunter records were available from 191 cooperators who reported hunting activities in 2008. The average number of ruffed grouse flushed per hour by cooperators in 2008 (2.1) was similar to the average number of birds flushed per hour in 2007 (2.0). The average number of woodcock flushed per hour statewide by cooperators was similar between 2008 (1.3) and 2007 (1.2). Significant changes in the Michigan woodcock index based on the singing-ground survey from 2008 to 2009 were not detected ( $P>0.05$ ). Significant declines in the number of singing males also were not detected in Michigan and the Central Region during 1999-2009, but significant longerterm (1968-2009) declines were detected ( $P<0.05$ ). Woodcock banders in Michigan spent approximately 1,600 hours afield in 2009 and banded 912 chicks. There were 83.4 chicks observed and 55.8 chicks banded per 100 hours of search time, compared to 93.9 observed and 76.0 banded in 2008. Due to budget constraints, the ruffed grouse drumming survey was not conducted statewide in 2009. However, 42 drumming routes were run in the Upper Peninsula and there was no difference ( $P=0.6$ ) in the average number of drums heard per route between 2008 (18.9) and 2009 (18.0). An estimated 303,000 grouse were harvested in Michigan during 2007 which was not significantly different than the number harvested in 2006 (271,000).

### **INTRODUCTION**

Ruffed grouse and American woodcock are forest game birds appreciated by many people. In 2007, about 89,000 hunters pursued grouse and 38,000 hunters pursued woodcock (Frawley 2008). In addition, the federal Harvest Information Program indicates that

Michigan leads the nation in the number of active woodcock hunters and harvest (Cooper and Parker 2009). Non-hunters also value ruffed grouse and American woodcock. Bird watchers, hikers, bikers, campers, and others familiar with Michigan's woods know ruffed grouse well for the soft thumping beat of a drumming male and the surprising start of an explosive grouse flush. Bird watchers scour open areas on spring mornings and evenings to observe the woodcock's unique and entertaining courtship display. For these and many other reasons, ruffed grouse and American woodcock are a valuable Michigan wildlife

resource.

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) uses several surveys to monitor grouse and woodcock populations. Hunter cooperator surveys, spring breeding surveys, and harvest surveys contribute valuable management information each year. Grouse and woodcock spring surveys are conducted by DNR staff, biologists from other agencies, and volunteers. The hunter cooperator survey is possible through data collected by volunteer hunters and shared with the DNR. Harvest information is collected from a random sample of license buyers after the end of each hunting season. The results from the 2006 and 2007 hunting seasons and 2008 and 2009 breeding seasons are described in this report.

## **METHODS**

### **2006-2007 Comparisons**

#### ***Harvest Survey***

Each year, questionnaires are sent to a randomly selected set of people who had purchased a small game hunting license during the previous hunting seasons. Detailed methods and results from the 2007 small game harvest survey are compiled in a separate report (Frawley 2008). Findings pertaining to ruffed grouse and woodcock have been summarized in the results section of this report.

### **2007-2008 Comparisons**

#### ***Hunter Cooperator Surveys***

Hunter Cooperator surveys rely on volunteer hunters that record numbers of hours hunted and ruffed grouse and woodcock flushed each day of hunting. Data obtained from cooperating hunters are summarized by county and by two-week intervals as the average number of grouse or woodcock flushed per hour of hunting. Hunting data were excluded from analyses when effort was <20 hours. Flush rates reported by cooperators provide an early indicator of harvest, but the final estimates of hunting effort and harvest come from a post-season mail survey of randomly selected hunters (e.g., Frawley 2008).

### **2008-2009 Comparisons**

#### ***Spring Breeding Surveys***

Department of Natural Resources personnel and volunteers conduct spring breeding surveys of ruffed grouse and woodcock along roadside routes. Each route has ten listening stops that are consistent from year to year. The number of ruffed grouse drums or

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woodcock heard during a fixed time interval (four and two minutes, respectively) is recorded at each stop. Because timing of breeding and habitat preferences differ for the two species, separate surveys are conducted. The woodcock singing-ground survey is coordinated by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) in cooperation with the DNR. The grouse drumming survey is coordinated by the DNR. Ruffed grouse survey routes were established in locations of known grouse populations. Similarly, before 1968, woodcock routes were established in locations of known woodcock populations. However, beginning in 1968, the USFWS established woodcock routes within randomly-chosen 10-minute blocks (Cooper and Parker 2009). Data for both surveys are summarized as the number of woodcock or grouse heard per survey route.

In addition, volunteers band woodcock each spring to monitor recruitment and trends in survival. The data are summarized as the number of woodcock chicks observed and banded per 100 hours of effort.

## **RESULTS**

### **2006-2007 Comparisons**

#### ***Harvest Surveys***

An estimated 303,000 grouse were harvested in Michigan during 2007 which was not significantly different than the number harvested in 2006 (271,000; Frawley 2008).

Approximately 89,000 grouse hunters spent nearly 647,000 days grouse hunting in Michigan during the 2007 hunting season.

Approximately 38,000 hunters harvested about 113,000 woodcock and spent about 219,000 days afield in 2007 (Frawley 2008). The 2007 harvest was approximately 71% lower than the record harvest of 390,000 woodcock in 1976. However, there also were more hunters (126,000) spending more days afield (908,000) in 1976 than in 2007 (Figure 1). The average number of woodcock harvested per hunter day was higher in 2006 than in 1976 (Figure 2).

## **2007-2008 Comparisons**

### ***Hunter Cooperator Surveys***

Hunter records were available from 191 cooperators who spent 5,999 hours afield in 2008 and 5,770 hours afield in 2007. The average number of ruffed grouse flushed per hour by cooperators in 2008 (2.1) was similar to the average number of birds flushed per hour in 2007 (2.0). In 2008, grouse flush rates were highest in Zone 2 (Northern Lower Peninsula; 2.2), followed by zones 1 (Upper Peninsula; 2.1), and 3 (Southern Lower Peninsula; 1.1), respectively (Figure 3 and Appendix A). The highest average flush rates reported by cooperators were during October 16-31 in Zone 1. The highest average flush rates in Zone 2 were during September 15-30 and during November 1-14 (Table 1).

The average number of woodcock flushed per hour statewide by cooperators was similar between 2008 (1.3) and 2007 (1.2). Woodcock flush rates were highest in Zone 2 (1.5),

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followed by zones 3 (1.4) and 1 (0.9), respectively (Figure 4 and Appendix B). Average flush rates peaked during October 1-15 in all zones (Table 1).

## **2008-2009 Comparisons**

### ***Spring Breeding Surveys***

#### *Ruffed Grouse Drumming Survey*

Due to personnel limitations, the ruffed grouse drumming survey was not conducted statewide in 2009. However, 42 drumming routes were run in the Upper Peninsula. In 2008, 50 drumming routes were run in the Upper Peninsula. A paired t-test was performed using data from the 42 routes run in both years. There was no difference ( $P=0.6$ ) in the average number of drums heard per route between 2008 (18.9) and 2009 (18.0). Because routes were not conducted in Ontonagon and Gogebic counties in 2009, results do not represent those counties.

#### *American Woodcock Singing Ground Survey*

Results of Michigan woodcock singing-ground survey were based on preliminary analysis of data from 109 survey routes (Cooper and Parker 2009). No significant changes in the woodcock index for Michigan between 2008 and 2009 were detected ( $P>0.05$ ). An average of 4.03 and 4.08 singing males were heard per route in 2008 and 2009, respectively. The 2009 Central Region index, consisting of information from Illinois, Indiana, Manitoba, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, Ontario, and Wisconsin, was not significantly different from 2008 ( $n=405$ ,  $P<0.05$ ). In the Central Region, there were an average of 2.55 and 2.61 singing males heard per route in 2008 and 2009, respectively (Cooper and Parker 2009). Significant declines in the number of singing males were not detected in Michigan and the Central Region during 1999-2009, but significant longer-term (1968-2009) declines were detected ( $P<0.05$ ). In 2008, the Central Region had a significant decline in the 10-year trend, which was the first time since 2003 that the Central Region has shown a significant

decline in the 10-year trend (Cooper et al. 2008). Michigan and the Central Region have experienced an average long-term decline of 1.2% and 1.1% per year, respectively, since 1968 ( $P < 0.05$ ; Cooper and Parker 2009).

#### *Woodcock Banding Activities*

Woodcock banders in Michigan spent approximately 1,600 hours afield in 2009 and banded 912 chicks. The average brood size observed was 3.0, compared to 3.1 in 2008. In 2009, there were 83.4 chicks observed and 55.8 chicks banded per 100 hours of search time, compared to 93.9 chicks observed and 76.0 chicks banded per 100 hours in 2008.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **2009 Grouse Population Status and Hunting Forecast**

Ruffed grouse have approximately ten-year cycles in abundance over much of Canada, Alaska, and the Great Lakes states of Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Michigan (Rusch et al. 1999). Biologists in Minnesota have conducted drumming surveys since 1949, and grouse

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cycles have peaked near the end of each decade (Dexter 1999). In 2009, Minnesota experienced grouse drumming indices as high as counts during their last 3 peak years, including 1998 (Larson 2009; Figure 5). Michigan ruffed grouse harvest estimates appear to follow population cycles (Figures 3 and 6). This population cycle appears similar to the fluctuations observed in Wisconsin and Minnesota (Figure 5). Over the years many theories have been proposed to explain these cycles including diseases, weather, forest fires, sunspots, starvation, crowding, predators, genetic changes, and chance (Rusch 1989). The most recent low in grouse abundance occurred during 2004-2005 for most of Michigan (Figures 3, 6, and 7). The most recent high in grouse abundance occurred between 1998 and 2000 in Zone 1 (Figures 3 and 7). Michigan appears to be approaching the peak in the grouse population cycle. If this is the case, 2010 and 2011 may be the next grouse population peak.

We expect hunters to see about the same number or a few more grouse this fall. With favorable annual production, hunters could take approximately 300,000 grouse in 2009. Hunters should note that increased or decreased abundance of animals at a regional scale does not ensure the same trend locally. Areas of good habitat will continue to provide the best grouse hunting opportunities. Grouse are most abundant in areas where dense young forest habitats (5-15 years old) are common (Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies Resident Game Bird Working Group 2006). The best grouse cover is usually provided by dense aspen stands 6 to 15 years old or older stands with dense under stories of alder or hazel (Thompson and Dessecker 1997).

### **2009 Woodcock Population Status and Hunting Forecast**

The long-term decline in the woodcock population index raises questions and concerns about available habitat and the effects of hunting. The declining availability of quality habitat is believed to be a primary cause for the decline in the population (Dessecker and Pursglove 2000). The USFWS has adjusted woodcock hunting season dates and reduced bag limits four times since 1968 in response to the general status of woodcock.

A North American Woodcock Conservation Plan was written to help guide woodcock management in each region of the continent within woodcock range. The document is available online at [www.michigan.gov/dnr](http://www.michigan.gov/dnr) or [www.timberdoodle.org](http://www.timberdoodle.org). Professionals are also working on developing habitat initiatives where the plan will be used to guide the creation of quality habitat that will benefit woodcock as well as other species that have similar habitat requirements.

More woodcock are banded in Michigan than in any other state or Canada. In fact,

Michigan banders have banded greater than 20,000 more woodcock than the next largest banding state (Maine) since 1981 (Mayhew and Luukkonen *in press*). Woodcock survival estimates based on Michigan woodcock banding data analyses is reported by Krementz et al. (2003) and Mayhew and Luukkonen (*in press*).

Woodcock hunters may expect a season similar to last year. The USFWS framework allows for the woodcock hunting season to open no earlier than the Saturday closest to September 22 and to run for no more than 45 days. In 2009, the opening date is September 19 and hunters are projected to take up to 120,000 woodcock this fall. While good numbers of woodcock can be found in all parts of Michigan, the highest densities are located in the northern two-thirds of the state.

### **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

We thank all the cooperators who provided grouse and woodcock hunting records and participated in banding woodcock. Steve Merchant and Adam Bump provided historical data for Minnesota and Wisconsin drumming counts. Many DNR employees and volunteers conducted spring breeding surveys and assisted in data entry. Theresa Riebow, Joseph Bauer, Ryan Soulard, and Jennifer Olson helped with the cooperator data. Artwork was drawn by Jennifer Kleitch. Brian Frawley, Pat Lederle, Dave Luukkonen, Russ Mason, Cheryl Nelson, and Doug Reeves, reviewed an earlier version of this report. Portions of this report were copied in whole or in part from previous status reports. Similar reports may be found at [www.michigan.gov/dnr](http://www.michigan.gov/dnr).

### **A CALL TO ACTION**

#### **DNR Seeks Public Input on Habitat Management for Wildlife**

The Department of Natural Resources will hold two public meetings in December to help wildlife officials identify species in need of special attention as the DNR develops habitat management plans across the state.

The meetings are scheduled for Dec. 8 at the Munising-Wetmore Area Super 8 Motel, located at East Hwy 28 and Federal Hwy 13 in Munising, and Dec. 9 at the Mt. Pleasant Comfort Inn & Suites, located at 2424 South Mission St. in Mt. Pleasant. Both meetings will be from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

The DNR Wildlife Division recently has completed a management plan for bears and currently is writing a plan for white-tailed deer. In addition, wildlife officials have developed a list of featured species and are asking the public to help focus on the habitat needs of those and other species.

“Knowing which wildlife species Michigan citizens value most will

help in the effective management of wildlife habitat,” said DNR wildlife habitat specialist Kerry Fitzpatrick. “These meetings are an important step in creating a wildlife habitat program.”

Featured species are those that are highly valued and have a habitat issue the DNR can address. They may include mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians or insects. The needs of these species will impact habitat management decisions.

“We’re asking the public: Did we miss any important species?” Fitzpatrick said. “How should we prioritize these species? These are questions we need to answer before we embark on major habitat management efforts.”

All interested parties are encouraged to attend and participate. Persons with disabilities needing accommodations for effective participation in the meetings should contact Kerry Fitzpatrick at 517-3737-1263 or [fitzpatrickk@michigan.gov](mailto:fitzpatrickk@michigan.gov), at least seven days prior to the meeting to request mobility, visual, hearing or other assistance.

Written comments may be sent to Kerry Fitzpatrick, DNR Wildlife Division, P.O. Box 30444, Lansing, MI 48909-7944 or [fitzpatrickk@michigan.gov](mailto:fitzpatrickk@michigan.gov). Written comments will be accepted until Dec. 15, 2009.

The DNR is committed to the conservation, protection, management, accessible use and enjoyment of the state’s natural resources for current and future generations.

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