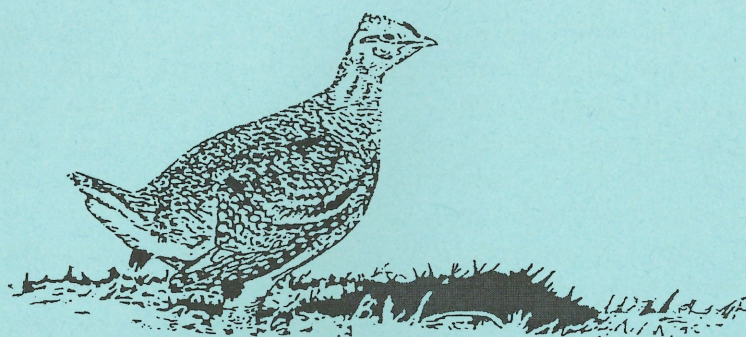


WISCONSIN SHARP-TAILED GROUSE SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



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Brush-cutting Event for Sharptails

by Dave Evenson

The Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society and the US Forest Service are hosting a work party on March 28 2009 at the Riley Lake Sharp-tailed Grouse Area northeast of Phillips.

Sharp-tailed grouse are an interesting part of Wisconsin's (WI) bird life. They require large open areas of brush land or bogs ranging in the thousands of acres. Sharptails flourished in WI in the era of the big cutover, and have held their own in a few areas specifically managed for them, and in other areas where bog or brushy farmland provide habitat. Riley Lake is one of the areas where both big bog and upland management coincide.

We will meet at Country Café in Fifiel at 8:00 for a lumberjack breakfast and caravan to the work site from there. Participants should bring lopping shears or Sandvik brush axes, with no power tools. Our mission will be cutting small scattered trees or brush in

areas where fire or machines don't reach. At noon, Chef Tom Zeigeweid will provide generous serving of bog burgers or equal culinary delights. Another few hours of work, a group picture of a job well done and we'll be on our way. For more information contact Dave Evenson WSGS at 715-822-3397 dave3397@centurytel.net or Suzanne Adams USFS 715-748-4875, Mike Bablick of USFS at 715-762-2461 or Dan Eklund, USFS at 715-762-5194.

Mark the Annual Meeting Dates on Your Calendar Now

The 2009 WSGS annual meeting will be held in Grantsburg, on Saturday and Sunday, April 25 and 26, 2009. The business meeting will begin at 1 p.m. on Saturday in the Crex Meadows Wildlife Education and Visitor Center. An important part of the short business meeting this year will be the approval of changes to the WSGS Bylaws – mainly increasing the Board from seven to nine members. The sharptail genetics rescue project and the rewrite of the DNR's sharptail management plan are planned for discussion. The meeting will end following door prize drawings.

A social hour prior to the catered dinner in the Center will start the evening festivities. Following dinner, a presentation will be made as an introduction to the Crex Meadows Wildlife Area. Since sharptail numbers are normally adequately counted by the Crex DNR crew, a dawn bus tour of the wildlife area on Sunday is planned for those attending the annual meeting. A catered brunch will be served following the tour. WSGS members should be headed home by noon on Sunday. More information and a registration form will be provided in the next newsletter.

From your President

by Dave Evenson

I like maps. Maybe it goes back to my days in Boy Scouts, or maybe to my time as an artillery forward observer. Whatever the reason, I like maps and air photos. So when I was researching my testimony for the Natural Resources Board in favor of the Pershing Wildlife Area boundary expansion, it was only natural that I would pull up the maps and air photos of the existing Pershing and the land between Pershing's north and south units. I was surprised at the small amount of land within the existing Pershing boundaries that looked to me to be sharp-tailed grouse breeding and chick rearing habitat. Just looking at the maps, I'd have to say that I wouldn't think sharptails could exist there, even though I know they do. The new 7000 acres that was approved by the NRB certainly can make the maps and the habitat look better sometime in the future. However, just owning some more land won't provide the habitat; it's going to take concerted and dedicated habitat management for the birds to take notice.

The new Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Plan is reaching its first draft status, with most of the substantive issues under agreement. WSGS has been welcomed to the table at the committee that includes DNR and USFS sharptail managers, University and DNR researchers, and other interested parties. One of the final decisions was tying sharptail population goals (substantially bigger than present populations) with actual habitat opportunities and corridors available on the landscape. It's sobering to look at a state land use map and see how very few and how very small are the parcels of shrub-scrub (sharptail habitat).

Creating and maintaining open barrens habitat adequate to provide secure sharptail populations will be a great challenge to wildlife managers and the agencies they work for. Before we start looking for new opportunities, it is obvious that wildlife lands already dedicated or suited to open barrens should be managed that way. I have been a wildlife manager, and I know that is challenging to wildlife managers in two ways. It's often easier to manage for ruffed grouse and deer than sharptails. First, it takes more budget and more hands-on management to manage for big open barrens. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, a manager must be able to stand up and convince a host of deer and partridge hunters that open barrens are a valuable part of Wisconsin habitat. I give kudos to Pete Engman and the GLG crew for clearing Fish Lake Wildlife Area, to Stuart Boren and company for restoring Spread Eagle Natural Area and to the USFS planning team for increasing management size and intensity on Moquah Barrens. It took courage, dedication and hard work to do these actions. The sharptails have not yet taken advantage of these works, but other Wisconsin native plants and animals have already benefited. Some of our other sharptail properties are managed nearly to the maximum possible, but others hold unrealized potential to be made into open habitat with more clearing and maintenance.

Call for Nominations

The three-year terms of Board Members John Zapota and Dave Clausen expire in 2008. If the proposed bylaw changes are approved at the upcoming annual meeting, the WSGS board plans to appoint two additional board members, one board member to a one-year temporary term and the other to a two-year temporary term. Anyone interested in serving in any of these positions or nominating someone for these positions, please send your name or the name of the person nominated along with a short resume to Jim Evrard at WSGS, 102 E. Crex Ave., Grantsburg, WI 54840.

The **Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society (WSGS)** is a private, nonprofit conservation organization dedicated to the preservation of the sharp-tailed grouse and its habitat in Wisconsin.

WSGS OFFICERS

President: Dave Evenson

Vice President: Tom Ziegeweid

Secretary/Treasurer: Jim Evrard

Newsletter Editor: Jim Evrard

Board Members: Ed Frank, Dave Clausen, Blair Klein, John Zatopa

Pershing Boundary Expansion Approved

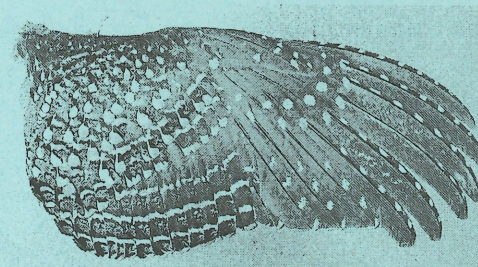
The front-page article of the last newsletter reported on the effort to expand the acquisition boundaries of the Pershing Wildlife Area (PWA) located in western Taylor County. After a May public meeting and additional public input, the DNR approved nearly doubling the 7,900-acre PWA by adding 7,000 acres to its boundaries. In October, the DNR's Natural Resources Board stamped their approval on the proposal.

The PWA is one of the few managed heavy-soil areas in Wisconsin that still support significant numbers of sharptails. Most of the state's remaining sharptails are found in the Northwest Sands, from Grantsburg to Bayfield. Doubling the PWA's size will help insure the long-term viability of the sharp-tailed grouse in north central Wisconsin.

DNR wildlife biologists Ken Jonas from Hayward and Mark Schmidt from Ladysmith should be credited for developing the idea to increase the size of the PWA and for pursuing that idea. WSGS Board Member Dave Clausen provided valuable support to gain DNR approval of the proposal. Other WSGS Board Members that lobbied for approval included President Dave Evenson, Secretary/Treasurer Jim Evrard, and Board Member Ed Frank. Sportsmen's and birdwatcher groups also lent their support to the proposal. This is another small, but significant, victory for sharp-tailed grouse and their habitat in the state.

Progress in Genetic Rescue Project

by Jim Evrard



Sharptail wings were collected this past fall in Wisconsin, Minnesota, and North Dakota to learn more about the genetics of the grand gamebird. Wisconsin samples are being used to bolster previous small samples and at Wisconsin's request, Minnesota also collected sharptail wings from their hunters. Since many Minnesota hunters also hunt in North Dakota, a number of sharptail wings from that state were also collected. This project was featured in a segment of Eau Claire's Dave Carlson's Outdoor TV show as well as the

Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society's (MSGS) newsletter.

Previous research had shown that the genetic diversity of Wisconsin sharp-tailed grouse was low due to the small size and isolation of our populations. By contrast, genetic material sampled from North and South Dakota and Nebraska showed high genetic diversity (a large number of alleles) since their populations are large and interconnected. What wasn't known was the genetic diversity of Minnesota sharptails living between the Dakotas and Wisconsin. If the Minnesota birds have high genetic diversity, Minnesota might be a source of sharptails to translocate to Wisconsin in an effort to boost our sharptail's genetics.

The Minnesota DNR and the MSGS took the lead obtaining wings from their hunters. Dr. Brad Swanson of Central Michigan University will analyze tissue from the wings. The WSGS agreed to pay half the cost of the analysis for the Minnesota sharptails.

Present plans call for trapping and moving female sharptails from Unit 2 (the industrial forest area south of Brule) to the Crex Meadows and Pershing wildlife areas. The WSGS Board agrees to provide up to \$3,000 for this trap and transfer effort planned for the coming spring.

2008 Wisconsin Sharptail Harvest

by Jim Evrard

DNR Upland Bird Ecologist Scott Hull provided the following 2008 sharptail harvest report. The numbers are based on registration stubs turned in through December and should be considered preliminary due to late-arriving stubs and additional information provided from hunter surveys and submitted wings. The final harvest numbers might be a bit higher.

<u>Unit</u>	<u>Permits Available</u>	<u>First Choice Applicants</u>	<u>Reported 2008 Harvest</u>	<u>Percent Success</u>	<u>Final 2007 Harvest</u>
2	700	178	26	4	25
8	50	112	15	30	10
9	100	78	2	2	0
10	25	92	3	12	5
Totals	875	460	46	5	40

As you can see, the sharptail harvest increased by six birds from 40 in 2007 to 46 in 2008. Overall hunting success expressed as the number of birds harvested compared to the number of permits available remained low, about 5% with individual units ranging from 2% in Unit 9 to 30 percent in Unit 8.

Unit 9 is a large unit with sharptails widely distributed, making hunting difficult while the sharptail habitat in Unit 8 is concentrated in the Namekagon Barrens Wildlife Area, making hunting easier. The sharptail density in Unit 8 is probably considerably higher than in Unit 9. Unit 2 is much like Unit 9 with widely distributed sharptails mainly in industrial forests. However, Unit 10 is mostly the Crex Meadows Wildlife Area where for some unknown reason, the sharptail population is doing poorly despite there being considerably more habitat than in the Barrens.



Art for Conservation

by Jim Evrard

By now you are probably aware of several efforts of the WSGS to raise funds for sharptails through the art world. Last year we sent fliers to WSGS members asking them to buy limited edition prints of a painting donated to our organization by artist

Ruth King of Spooner. The painting featured a group of sharptails on a “dancing ground” or lek in the Namekagon Barrens Wildlife Area in the northeast corner of Burnett County. While the sale of those prints have been slow, they contribute to our income needed to help preserve sharptails in Wisconsin.

WSGS and Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society (MSGs) members also received a flier at the beginning of this year promoting a raffle of an original sharptail painting by artist Buzz Balzer of Cashton. The painting depicts a group of sharptails in the winter, feeding on white birch buds. The scene is very much like you would find in the Crex Meadows Wildlife Area. The raffle differs from the print sale in that the one-of-a-kind original oil painting is much more valuable than a print. Balzer donated half of the profits from the raffle to the WSGS for our sharptail work. Other than memberships, the art raffles are the biggest source of income for the WSGS.

Afield with Ziggy

by Thomas Ziegeweid



As I’m writing this article, I’m reflecting on the just completed 2008 hunting season. My aging body still aches, but one must keep plugging along.

I went to Minnesota hunting sharptails twice, but only shot two birds. The first trip was to their “east-central” zone near McGregor, where I missed a lot of shots, but managed to scratch down two birds. Between myself and my chums, we managed to collect some wings for the ongoing genetic study our club is helping to fund. Hats off to the Minnesota DNR and MSGS for jumping on this project with enthusiasm.

Plenty of birds were to be found in the areas we hunted, however, it is interesting how the “hot areas” seem to change from year to year.

My second trip to Minnesota was in the “northwest” zone early in October. The number of birds I saw was outstanding to say the least. However, what you see is not necessarily what you bag. I didn’t bag a bird, but my old friend Marshall

Dieters shot one on his farm near Wanaska when we did an impromptu hunt one afternoon.

When we came back to his house, he put his bird on a makeshift table in his front yard and we proceeded to get a wing collection form, which we filled out. About ten minutes expired before I went out to get the bird to clip the wing off ... only to find the bird had been absconded by some critter! Marshall mentioned that a big old tomcat had been hanging around his shed recently. We searched with flashlights for his bird to no avail. Needless to say I managed to salvage some feathers from the table and my vest to send to Eric Nelson for the DNA study.

When our sharptail season opened in Wisconsin, I along with my friend Pat Otteson went hunting on the opener to Zone 2. There were T-Zone deer hunters in abundance in the sharptail country that day, which might explain why we didn’t see a single bird all day. Zone 2 birds are really elusive and may be moving east to recent clear-cut areas. I was fortunate to bag a nice buck fawn that weekend, which has almost been consumed as I write this article.

As anyone who is familiar with wildlife habitat will tell you, you will have an abundance of whatever species will find the current land use patterns to their liking. There was an era where there were prairie chickens and sharptails in every county in Wisconsin. Now all that remains are remnant populations of both species. In the future there may be wild turkeys in every county in Wisconsin. This fall I spotted gazillions of turkeys...all over...everywhere I hunted. Last winter the “winter index” of wildlife survival was super high in central Wisconsin, namely the Sandhill area. The turkeys seemed to have weathered the storm well, as I spotted 50 to 75 birds a day in central Wisconsin. It seemed one of their preferred places to feed was in the front yard of a cranberry growers house.

Ruffed grouse are in trouble! No, they are not going to be on the threatened species list anytime soon. But despite the current “high cycle”, they were pretty hard to find just about anywhere I hunted. I did manage to bag four birds, but then I also bagged four turkeys. It is easier to find turkeys anywhere than ruffies, even compensating for their size and visibility. The woods are getting too overgrown, less edges, less young cover. We need more intelligent timber harvest (patchy) in the future to get old ruff’s population back up. Food for thought.

Go figure – Iron County bobwhites? In late October my brother Pat went to his cottage on the Turtle-Flambeau Flowage with some of his cronies. His friends decided to go hunting grouse in an area I am familiar with north of the flowage in a recent patchy clear-cut (aspen) with openness to it. The place looks like a good grouse and snowshoe hare area to me. They flushed a rather large covey of what they thought were grouse and bagged some. When they retrieved them they knew they weren’t ruffies but upon securing another opinion from a person they knew, they had shot quail (this was legal by the way). I found it hard to believe that these birds were natives, perhaps someone’s release of pen-reared birds. Quite interesting!

Bird Hunting Reminisces of Former Board Member

by Jim Evrard

Not too long ago Tom Jancoski, a former WSGS Board Member from Granton, wrote me a very interesting letter in which he reminisced about his early bird hunting in Wisconsin. Although he didn't hunt sharptails, I found his stories good reading. He graciously allowed me to reproduce the following part of his letter here.

"I started bird hunting in 1948 with a .410 single shot strapped to my bike, and that fall dropped a Hungarian partridge or 'hunkie,' as we affectionately called them. By 1949 my log indicated I harvested 2 pheasants, 2 'hunkies' and 3 woodcock. By then I was using my older brother's Model 37 Ithica pump with the polychoke set on improved cylinder."

"In 1950, I bought my own Ithica pump with money earned setting pins. Upland bird hunting was my passion as well as my older brother's. Sand County Almanac was our bible. In 1951 we hunted ruffed grouse in Florence Co. while primitive camping at Lost Lake south of Chipmunk Rapids. The practice of spring shooting of pigeons barreling out of barns and silos started to pay off as I put 7 grouse down and into my game coat."

"We also started hunting Green and Richland counties for pheasants and quail. I ended up with the season on Nov. 30th getting a double on pheasants after tracking them in the snow. I was getting too big for my britches."

"In 1955, on Nov. 7th, my hunting partner Don with his English Pointer, Oakie, and me with my Springer, located 7 coveys of quail between Gotham and Twin Bluffs, along County Road OO from Ash Creek to Indian Creek."

"It was a time when we could get permission at every farm we stopped at, and there wasn't a tree stand every 40 acres. The wide hedgerows and weedy corn and soybean fields left lots of waste grain along with foxtail grass seeds. The steep hillsides provided acorns, grape tangles and berry patches next to the coulees. The mild winters of 1953 and 1954 gave the quail populations a chance to expand their range and numbers. My Springer was in his prime and we worked as a team. After finding a roost site with its ring of droppings, perfume to his nostrils, he would look up at me with his tail a blur and almost say with his eyes, 'they were here last night partner'."

"On Nov. 13, 1955, I took a co-worker from southern Illinois hunting who didn't believe we had quail in Wisconsin. The temperatures were in the 40s with a light wind. The steep hillsides and coulees with their tobacco barns reminded him of his Illinois home. We had good shooting on 4 coveys of quail and even a grouse covey. At our last spot along Indian Creek just north of the Wisconsin River bottom land we found a big covey and I shot a triple which filled our limits and we even added a rooster pheasant to our mixed bag. Not only was he impressed with the beautiful terrain and the number of coveys we found, but also with the size of our larger northern quail. It was one of those unforgettable days that worked out even better than planned."

Due to deteriorating health brought on by age, Tom no longer hunts. However, he is still enjoys the natural landscape and its wild inhabitants. In his own poetic words: "With failing eyesight I still thrill to the sound and blurred vision of nature at dawn's awakening." "But too many harvest moons have waxed and waned for me. The heady days of hunting from "kin to kant", first light on frosty mornings, to rosy sunsets with deepening shadows, are over for me." I hope Tom enjoys many more future sunrises and sunsets.

Teddy Hunts Sharptails

by Jim Evrard

While rereading Theodore ("Teddy") Roosevelt's book, *Ranch Life and the Hunting Trail*, for the umpteenth time, I came across a passage that described how Teddy hunted sharp-tailed grouse in the North Dakota Badlands in the late 1800s.

Roosevelt described how he and his cowboy crew hunted for food in the spring. The fresh meat of male pronghorn antelope was the main course of their meals, but they would vary their diet with other wild meat when possible. Roosevelt wrote:

"While on these early spring trips we sometimes vary the sport, and our fare as well, by trying our rifles on the mallards in the reedy sloughs, or on the jack rabbits as they sit up on their haunches to look at us, eighty or a hundred yards off. Now and then we creep up to and kill the cock prairie fowl [sharptails], when they have gathered into their dancing rings [leks] to posture with outstretched wings as they shuffle around each other, keeping up a curious clucking and booming that accord well with their grotesque attitudes."

By today's standards for hunting ethics and regulations, Roosevelt's method for hunting sharp-tails would be illegal and unethical. However, those standards did not exist at the time in North Dakota. Since Roosevelt went on to be probably the greatest champion of wildlife conservation and hunting of all of our presidents, he can be forgiven for his unorthodox method of sharptail hunting.



PLEASE RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP

Check the date on your mailing label and please renew your membership if it has expired or is about to expire. The WSGS is a small organization and depends heavily upon membership fees to continue the fight for the sharp-tailed grouse and its habitat in Wisconsin. Our membership fee is low compared to most conservation groups and supports all-volunteer members who serve as your board of directors and do the work of the society.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL

Name: _____

Street/PO Box _____

City: _____ State: _____

Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Would you like to volunteer for:

_____ Board of Directors

_____ Bird Censusing

_____ Newsletter

_____ Annual Meeting

Other: _____

Enclosed:

\$ _____ Dues (Regular - \$10, Supporting - \$25, Contributing - \$50, \$100 Sustaining, \$200 Sponsor)
(Dues are fully tax-deductible)

\$ _____ WSGS Logo Decal (\$1.50)

\$ _____ Four-color Cloth Patch (\$3.50)

\$ _____ Deluxe Green Corduroy Cap with Logo (\$14.00)

(All prices include postage and handling)

Total Enclosed: \$ _____

PLEASE MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO AND RETURN THIS APPLICATION TO:

Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society, 102 East Crex Ave., Grantsburg, WI 54840

WSGS

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