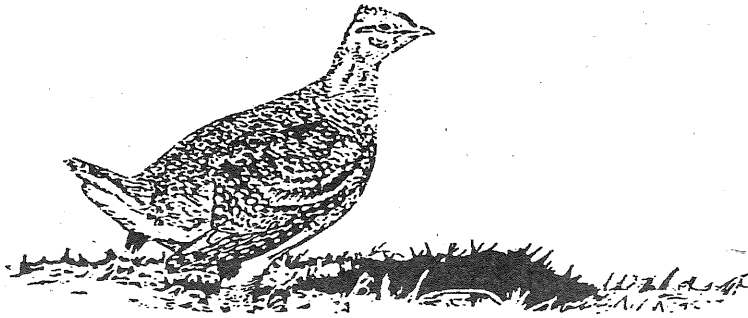


WISCONSIN SHARP-TAILED GROUSE SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



Number 40

Winter 2004

Volunteers Needed for Annual Sharptail Survey

By Jim Evrard

The WSGS, in cooperation with the DNR, will again count displaying sharp-tailed grouse throughout Wisconsin this spring. Volunteers are needed to assist DNR biologists in censusing managed properties and to count the birds in areas not covered by the DNR. The need for volunteers is especially great this year since the DNR does not have money to conduct the census. The Legislature's failure to increase the hunting and fishing license fees in 2003 has reduced DNR's field budgets by 70%.

The census period is from early April to mid-May. The biologists provide maps of census areas and the forms and instructions for the survey. The WSGS recruits volunteers and helps in the survey where possible.

The DNR is the permanent repository for the survey data collected. The information is used to determine the distribution and numbers of displaying sharptails. This information is needed each year to set the number of hunting permits available in the fall.

For the last few years, about a dozen or so WSGS volunteers have censused sharptails. I've spent many great mornings as a volunteer in the Crex Meadows Wildlife Area and the Brule River Barrens looking for sharptails.

If you enjoy roaming Wisconsin's wild open landscapes in early spring mornings when life returns after a long, cold and snowy winter, you will enjoy counting sharptails. And you will have the satisfaction of knowing that you personally have contributed to the management of this unique bird.

Volunteers for this worthy effort, should contact:

Jim Evrard
630 N. Pine St.
Grantsburg, WI 54840
(715)463-2446

"evrardsc@grantsburgtelcom.net"

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By Jim Evrard



The wheels of government and, sometimes, organizations turn slowly. In the last newsletter I expressed concern about the Wisconsin Legislature's treatment of the DNR and its land acquisition program. Thanks to Governor Doyle's vetoes, DNR land acquisition will apparently continue as it has in the past.

However, DNR management funding problems continue. The WSGS joined a statewide citizen's group dedicated to seeking adequate funding for the DNR, but little progress has been made by that group. The Legislature is not seeking to correct the DNR's funding problems, but is apparently continuing its attempt to dismantle the department. Without license fee increases or some other type of funding, wildlife management as we have known it outside of Madison will virtually cease, yet there is no cry from the sportsman to do anything about it.

Our Crex Meadows land acquisition project is still active but not yet completed. And our effort to secure additional land for Crex Meadows from Plum Creek Timber Company has also not yet been successful, but is still active.

We are also making slow progress on the effort to remove the sharptail hunting closed areas in the Moquah Barrens and Douglas County wildlife areas. These 'refuges' are no longer needed, given the new sharptail hunting regulations that provide sharptails safety from hunting when their numbers drop below a certain population threshold. That question should be on the ballot at the DNR's Spring Hearings and take effect in the fall of 2004 or 2005. Please speak for this rule change at the Spring Hearings you attend and vote for it!

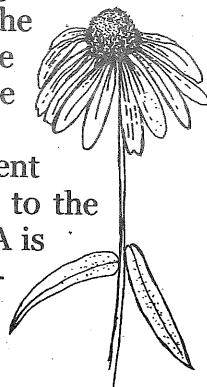
PROGRESS ON THE HABITAT FRONT

By Jim Evrard

The threat to the Douglas County Wildlife Area (DCWA) has been averted. The long-term lease that the DNR had with Douglas County for the DCWA (locally known as the "bird sanctuary") ended this year. During the process to renew the lease, advocates for all terrain vehicles (ATVs) approached the county with a request that 320 acres of the WA be dedicated as an ATV play park. There the motor-minds could rip and tear with their smelly, noisy machines to their heart's content and in the process, put money in the pockets of local bar, restaurant, and motel owners but destroy the barrens habitat and inhabitants (you can see my biases by my word choices). Other local officials also wanted a piece of the WA for an industrial park. These land use changes threatened the future of the DCWA and the sharptails living there.

Caring local citizens attended the Douglas County Board meetings opposing the proposed land changes. I also wrote a letter of opposition on behalf of the WSGS. As a result of public opposition to the suggested changes in land use and a well-planned campaign led by DNR Wildlife Biologist, Fred Strand, the county renewed the lease with the DNR for the full acreage and voted not to allow ATVs to use any part of the DCWA except on existing authorized trails. An annual lease fee of \$5 per acre with inflationary increases was agreed upon by Douglas County and the DNR.

Another good result of the citizen support for the DCWA was the development of the Friends of the Bird Sanctuary, a private, non-profit group dedicated to the support of the management program of the DCWA. The future of the DCWA is brighter given the existence of this citizen's watchdog group. Anyone interested in becoming a member of the friends group should read the article about the group elsewhere in this newsletter.



WSGS BOARD MEETS

The WSGS Board of Directors met on Monday, September 30 in Siren in conjunction with the Prairie Grouse Technical Council meeting. Board members Tim Connolly, Bob Dreis, Jim Evrard, Ed Frank, and Tom "Ziggy" Ziegeweid were present along with WSGS Father Dave Evenson and the DNR's Keith Warnke.

Tim Connolly gave the Treasurer's report that ended with the good news that our total cash assets as of September 22, 2003 were \$9,530.63 with \$5,000 of that amount committed to the Crex Meadows land purchase project.

Tim also announced that he was leaving Wisconsin due to a job promotion and could no longer be Treasurer. Jim offered to assume the Treasurer duties until election of officers at the next annual meeting. Evrard also announced his intention to step down as President at that time.

A total of 586 persons applied for 1,340 sharptail hunting permits this year with many hunters receiving two and three permits depending upon the units applied for. The Board discussed the possibility of a mailing to the 586 applicants to possibly increase our membership.

The Board decided to join the Wisconsin Stewardship Network (WSN) as a voting member after the WSN was recently granted nonprofit status. For the past several years, the WSGS has been donating \$35 per year to WSN and now that same amount will be considered our membership fee. The WSN is active as an environmental (air, water, soil, etc.) advocate in Wisconsin. A healthy environment is good for all creatures, including sharptails and us.

We are also a member of the new Wisconsin Outdoor Alliance that is an advocate for additional funding for DNR's wildlife management program. Jim will contact the group for recent information regarding their activities.

The WSGS was one of eight groups to sign a letter written by Gary Zimmer of the Ruffed Grouse Society that was sent to the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest supervisor regarding the lack of any discussion of the importance of hunting in the draft of the forest's revised 10-year management plan.

Tim presented a map he developed of central Wisconsin showing public land ownership and areas of recent sharptail activity. The need for starting a sharptail project in central Wisconsin was emphasized with a major problem of not being able to identify someone from that area that is interested in assuming a leadership role. Jim will contact DNR wildlife biologist Todd Nass to determine the progress of the Red Clay reintroduction project, which reportedly is being held up by the objection of the Ashland airport manager who fears sharptails colliding with aircraft if the birds are reintroduced to the area.

Better news came from the Douglas County Board with the renewal of the DNR lease on the Douglas County Wildlife Area and the ATV restrictions in that area. The option on the 170-acre tract in the Crex Meadows Wildlife Area was signed by the landowner and hopefully the WSGS will soon be able to donate our \$5,000 to partially fund the land transaction.

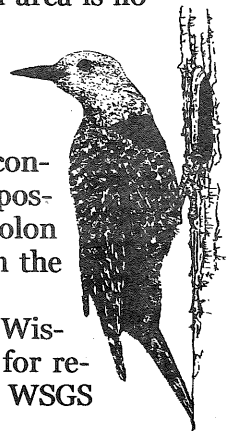
The Board was solicited to comment on the present DNR Sharp-tailed Grouse Management Plan in preparation for updating that plan in the future.

Jim will contact the concerned parties to set a meeting where the elimination of the sharptail hunting closed area on the Moquah Barrens Wildlife Area can be discussed. The closed area is no longer needed with the new sharptail hunting law.

The WSGS has signed on as a partner in the DNR's Upper Chippewa River Basin planning effort. Riley Lake and the Kimberly-Clark wildlife areas support sharptails and are found in that geographic region.

The first preference for the 2004 annual meeting site in Florence is northeast Wisconsin where the Spread Eagle Barrens would be featured. We could tour the area and possibly look for sharptails. The second choice for the annual meeting would be Solon Springs. The preferred dates would be Saturday and Sunday, April 24 and 25 with the alternate dates being May 1 and 2.

The terms for Tim and Ziggy expire in 2004. Since Tim will no longer be living in Wisconsin, there is a need to nominate at least one candidate in the event Ziggy runs for re-election. Dave reacted favorably to the proposal of being a board candidate. Other WSGS members are urged to consider running for the board.



2004 ANNUAL MEETING AND ART RAFFLE

Mark Saturday and Sunday, April 24 and 25 on your calendar for the 2004 WSGS annual meeting. The meeting will take place in Florence and will be the first time in northeast Wisconsin.

The business meeting will begin at 1 p.m. Saturday most likely in the Natural Resource Center located at the junction of Highways 70 and 2-141 just north of Florence. The program will begin at 3 p.m. followed by a social hour at 5 p.m. and dinner at 6 p.m.

Early Sunday morning we will look for sharp-tailed grouse in the area and tour the nearby Spread Eagle Barrens. Habitat restoration in the Spread Eagle Barrens is ongoing and the area may be the site of a future sharptail translocation project. The meeting will end with breakfast at 9 a.m. Meeting details (motels, meals, etc.) will be in the next newsletter.

The annual art raffle, our major fund raiser, will again include framed limited edition art prints of sharp-tailed grouse by the late Owen Gromme, Louie Raymer, and Karen Smith. There is the possibility of an original work of art by Ruth King also being offered in the raffle.

More on the raffle in the next newsletter.



2003 PRAIRIE GROUSE TECHNICAL COUNCIL MEETING

by Jim Evrard

The very successful Prairie Grouse Technical Council (PGTC) meeting was held in Siren, September 30 - October 2, 2003 (that statement might be biased since I was the treasurer and responsible for arranging the local events!). The WSGS hosted the event and played a prominent part in its success.

More than 120 people attended the three-day meeting that focused mostly on sharp-tailed grouse in Wisconsin's Northwest Pine Barrens and prairie chicken in central Wisconsin. The meeting took place at The Lodge resort hotel in Siren and featured a tour of the Northwest Pine Barrens. The all-day bus trip visited the four management areas in northwest Wisconsin, the Moquah Barrens, Douglas County, Namekagon Barrens, and Crex Meadows wildlife areas.

The North American Grouse Partnership (NAGP) decided to join the PGTC for part of the meeting. The NAGP is a new organization dedicated to the conservation of all grouse species in North America. The major objective of the grouse group is to develop a North American Grouse Management Plan patterned after the successful North American Waterfowl Plan.

The WSGS display, manned by board member Tom "Ziggy" Ziegeweid, was prominently featured at the meeting. In addition, a framed Gromme sharptail print was displayed as a raffle prize to earn money for future WSGS projects. The Father of the WSGS, Dave Evenson, contributed his framing talents to the raffle project that earned nearly \$400 for our group. I feel a bit guilty, but I won the print. But I want to state that my raffle ticket was drawn by a 12 year-old girl from Washington state whom I did not know!

The next PGTC meeting will be held in Valentine, Nebraska in 2005. Valentine is located on the northern edge of the famed sandhills region of Nebraska and is noted for its waterfowl and sharp-tailed grouse hunting. The eastern area of the sandhills also supports prairie chicken and pheasants. The PGTC meetings are usually held in September when upland game bird hunting seasons are open. This will be a good opportunity to attend the meeting and hunt sharptails

FRIENDS OF THE BIRD SANCTUARY

A good result of the citizen support for the renewal of the lease of the Douglas County Wildlife Area (DCWA) was the development of the Friends of the Bird Sanctuary (FOTBS), a private, non-profit group dedicated to the support of the management program of the DCWA. The future of the DCWA is brighter given the existence of this citizen's watchdog group.

The group was organized by Scott Peterson, a Minnesotan who has a cabin on the nearby Gordon or St. Croix Flowage. When he attended the meetings of the Douglas County Forestry Committee to voice his support of renewal of the DCWA lease, he became aware of the need for citizen supporters to organize to combat the commercial and recreational interests who wanted to convert the DCWA for other uses. Under Scott's leadership, the fledgling citizen's group was born and has grown into a viable organization.

A strategic plan has been developed and Board of Directors appointed. The Board elected David Biegel as President, Douglas Reisner, Vice President, and Scott Peterson, Secretary/Treasurer. Other board members are Julie Fromm, Moira Moga, Ron Tuversen, and Jim Evrard. A newsletter and a web site (www.fotbs.org) have been developed. **Anyone interested in becoming a member of the FOTBS group should contact Scott Peterson at the Friends of the Bird Sanctuary, P.O. Box 116, Gordon, WI 54838.**

A very successful friends group, The Friends of Crex, was established in 1985 for the Crex Meadows Wildlife Area. Crex Meadows supports the largest managed sharptail population in Wisconsin. Several individuals are seriously considering establishing a friends group for another major sharptail management area, the Moquah Barrens Wildlife Area. If a similar citizens group could be created for the Namekagon Barrens Wildlife Area, the future of the four major sharptail areas in Wisconsin's Northwest Pine Barrens would be strengthened. Perhaps, the WSGS could serve as an umbrella organization for the four friends groups.



BOARD NOMINATIONS

The terms of WSGS board members, Tom Ziegeweid and Tim Connolly, expire this year and nominations are being sought for the three-years terms for those two positions. Tim has moved to Montana and will not stand for reelection to the board. The board meets three times each year, usually in areas suitable for outdoor activities! Any member wishing to nominate a WSGS member or wanting themselves to become a board nominee should contact the WSGS, Box 367, Grantsburg, WI 54840)

2003 SHARPTAIL HARVEST

By Jim Evrard

With the elimination of the free hunting permit application from the Conservation Patron license, the number of 2003 permit applicants dropped to just under 600. With over 1,000 permits available, some hunters received two and even three permits. I received three permits for Unit 2 and saw a number of sharptails, but too far for shooting.

Keith Warnke, DNR wildlife staffer in Madison, provided the following preliminary 2003 sharp-tailed grouse harvest numbers. The statewide **reported** sharptail kill increased from 45 to 78 birds, a 73% increase! However, since the unreported kill is unknown, these numbers should be used with caution.

On a management unit basis, Unit 10 had the highest harvest, 33 sharptails (up 33% from 2002), followed by Unit 2 with 23 birds (up 3%), Unit 8 with 19 birds (up 19%), and Unit 9 with 3 birds (up 1%). Some of the increased harvest in 2003 might be due to more sharptails and some might be due to increased hunting pressure.

The number of dancing males in Unit 2 increased 84% from 143 in 2002 to 263 in 2003. In Unit 8, displaying sharptails increased from 27 birds in 2002 to 52 birds in 2003, a 93% increase. The increase in dancing males in Unit 9 from 2002 to 2003 was less, 11%, from 66 to 73 birds. There was no change in the number of dancing males in Unit 10, 61 birds, from 2002 to 2003.

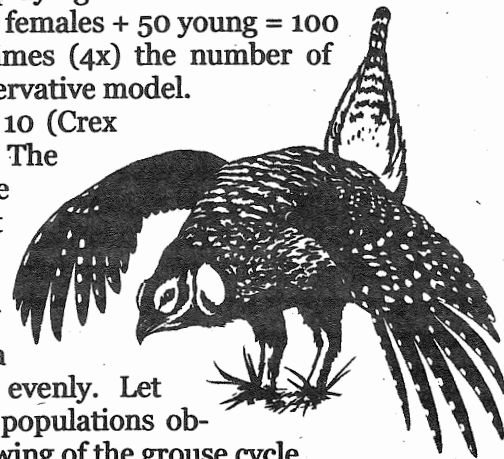
What does this all mean? Overall hunter success is still low, at about 7%, but varied considerably in individual management units with Unit 10 hunters having a 18% success rate and Unit 8 a 15% success rate. By contrast, Unit 2 had a 3% hunter success rate and Unit 9, a 2% success rate. Units 8 and 10's sharptails are found in the Namekagon Barrens and Crex Meadows wildlife management areas, respectively. On the other hand, sharptails in Units 2 and 9 are found primarily in unmanaged industrial forests where they inhabit large clearcuts. Apparently it is easier to find sharptails in the smaller special management areas than in the more widespread clearcuts.

The simple mathematical model that the DNR uses to determine the number of hunting permits to issue in management units goes something like this. A management unit needs at least 25 displaying males to possibly trigger a season. An equal spring sex ratio is assumed, meaning that if there are 25 displaying males, there are at least 25 females. Earlier research has shown that not all male sharptails display in the spring, meaning there are actually more males than the number of displaying males in a population. That would also mean there are more females than those calculated from the dancing male numbers.

Production is usually assumed to be two juvenile sharptails for every adult female in the fall population. This would mean that a unit with 25 displaying males should have a minimum fall population of 100 birds (25 males + 25 females + 50 young = 100 birds). More simply, the fall population is four times (4x) the number of spring displaying males. This is thought to be a conservative model.

If this model is correct, it would mean that Unit 10 (Crex Meadows) had a fall population of 244 sharptails. The harvest of 33 birds represented roughly 14% of the sharptails available. However, in Unit 2, only about 2% of the available sharptails were harvested.

These inequities in harvest and hunter success rates will be used in 2004 to adjust the number of hunting permits issued to assure the safe harvest of a population and to distribute hunting pressure more evenly. Let us hope that the overall upward trend in sharptail populations observed in 2003 will continue, reflecting the upward swing of the grouse cycle.



EARLY WISCONSIN SHARPTAIL RESEARCH

Ninth in a Series by Jim Hale

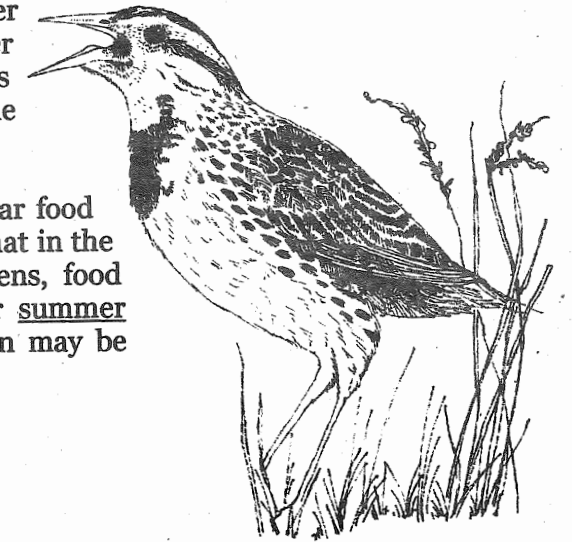
The following report appeared in the December 1958 issue of the Wisconsin Conservation Bulletin. It is the summary of a sharptail research project conducted by the Wisconsin Conservation Department's Wildlife Research Section.

"A recent analysis of 192 records of the habitats in which broods were found on the Douglas County grouse management area clearly shows why openings in otherwise forested areas are vitally important to sharp-tailed grouse.

Eighty percent of these observations were in open cover (mixtures of brush, cultivated land, or grassland). Another 15 percent were in essentially woods-edge types (roadsides through woods, small openings in woods, or thickets in the open).

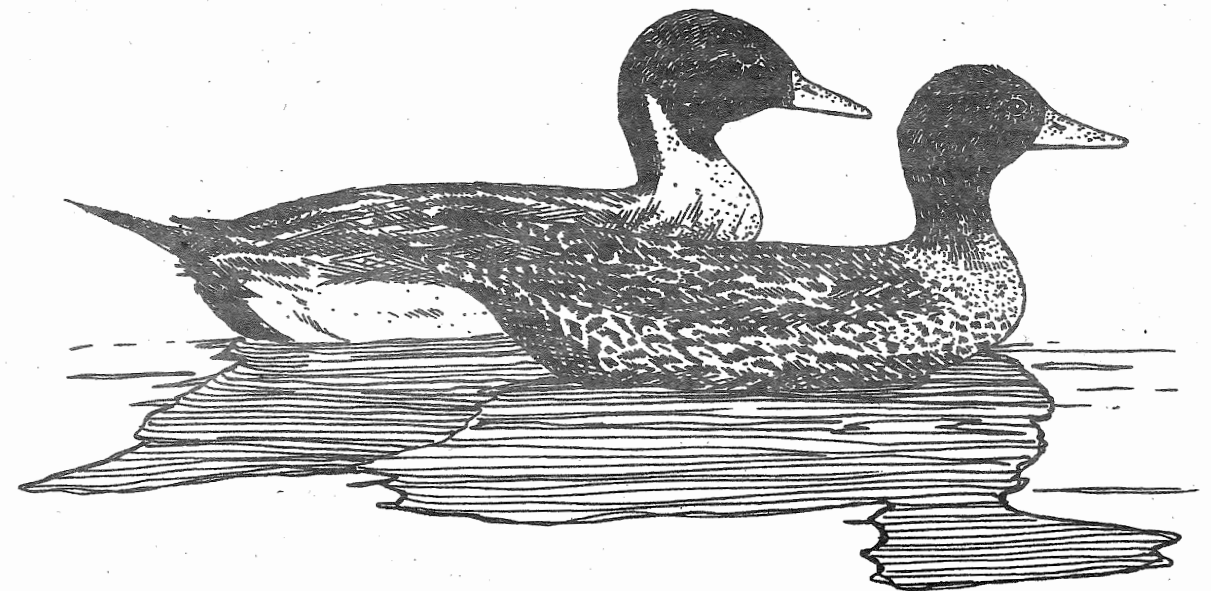
Only 5 percent were more than 50 yards into the woods.

Twenty-five percent of the broods were found in or near food patches, farm fields, or weedy old fields. This suggests that in the sandy, sterile soil of the northwestern Wisconsin barrens, food patches may have a not generally recognized value for summer food. The greens and insects that accompany cultivation may be more important than the planted grains."



CHECK YOUR MAILING LABEL

Check your mailing label for the expiration date. If your membership has expired (anything dated 2002 and earlier), please renew. Membership funds are important to carry out our programs benefiting Wisconsin's sharp-tailed grouse so renew your membership today.



**PLEASE CHECK THE DATE ON YOUR MAILING LABEL BELOW
TO DETERMINE IF YOU ARE PAID UP:**

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, PO Box 367, Grantsburg, WI 54840

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