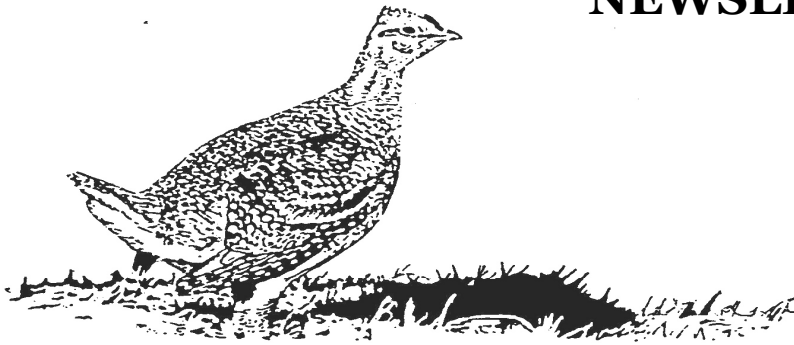


WISCONSIN SHARP-TAILED GROUSE SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



Number 74

Winter 2015

ANNUAL MEETING

This is a reminder that the 2015 WSGS Annual Meeting is being held at the Red Cliff Casino Hotel on Saturday and Sunday, April 25 and 26 on the Northern tip of the Bayfield Peninsula. This is the 25th Birthday of the WSGS, come help us celebrate!

The business meeting will be held at the Hotel beginning at 1 P.M. and ending at 5 P.M. when the raffle and door prize drawings will be held. Following a social hour, we will eat as a group in the Hotel restaurant, ordering off the menu.

There is no fee for the annual meeting and meeting reservations are not required. A block of rooms with two queen beds has been reserved at Hotel at a rate of \$89/night including breakfast the following morning. For room reservations call 715-779-3712. The meeting will resume the next morning with a visit to the Moquah Barrens Wildlife Area before returning to Red Cliff for a debriefing breakfast at the Hotel.

The WSGS will again conduct a raffle for three, framed, limited edition, ready-to-hang-on-your-wall art prints depicting sharp-tailed grouse. The annual art print raffle has been a major fund raiser for the WSGS. Income for memberships covers the costs of member services, including the newsletter and website, but raffle money provides money for special projects.

This year we will be offering artwork by Wisconsin's Dean of Wisconsin Wildlife Artists, the late Owen Gromme. This extremely rare artwork called "Sharptails on the Rise", featuring two fall sharptails, is a sold-out edition acquired in the secondary market.

The second artwork is a print-on-canvas of a winter flock of sharptails feeding on white birch buds. The artist, Buzz Balser, donated the original and the WSGS commissioned a small edition of prints to be used as fund raisers. Balzer's print has the appearance of an original painting.

The third print is by Louie Raymer and depicts a group of sharptails dancing in the spring in the Crex Meadows Wildlife Area. The print was donated to the WSGS by the Friends of Crex.

Tickets and information about entering the art print raffle will appear in the next newsletter that you should receive about a month prior to the annual meeting.

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FROM YOUR PRESIDENT

by Dave Evenson

Good things are happening in our northernmost sharptail range. I attended the recent DNR Sharp-tailed Grouse Committee meeting where two of the main topics focused on the shores of Lake Superior and Moquah Barrens Wildlife Area on the Bayfield Peninsula.

Tom Doolittle is the U.S. Forest Service Wildlife Biologist for the Moquah Barrens, part of the Chequamegon National Forest. He presented information from the most recent Moquah Barrens plan. The core area has been increased from 7,000 acres to 12,770 acres with surrounding surrogate habitat of an additional 10,000 acres. The prescribed burning effort and application has been doubled since 2009. One thing you can say for the Feds is that when they set out to burn, they do; helicopter torching and all. We wish there were more sharptails to enjoy this new habitat, and there may well be.

Todd Naas, Wisconsin DNR Wildlife Biologist at Ashland explained about the Lake Superior Landscape Restoration Partnership. Several hundred thousand dollars will be administered through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NCRS) focused on private land in the red clay portion of the Lake Superior Watershed. This initiative addresses habitat for several rare species including sharptails. We still have a small population of birds that use the open grasslands on private farms, and this initiative will aid landowners who want to pursue practices which will improve habitat even more.

I hope you will attend the WSGS annual meeting at Red Cliff, you will hear from both of these presenters there and you will get a chance to see the habitat first hand, and maybe even a few of our northern sharptails. April 25 – See you there!

CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

The terms of WSGS Board Members John Zatopa, John Probst and Paul Kooiker expire in 2015. Nominations are being sought for three-year terms for the three positions. Any member interested in serving on the WSGS Board and any member wishing to nominate fellow members to the Board, please write WSGS Secretary/Treasurer Jim Evrard or call at 715-463-2446 or email at grouse.7067@gmail.com.

THE WISCONSIN SHARP-TAILED GROUSE SOCIETY

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. Questions about the WSGS should be directed to the Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society, 102 East Crex Avenue, Grantsburg, WI 54840.

WSGS OFFICERS

President: Dave Evenson
Vice President: Tom Ziegeweid
Secretary/Treasurer: Jim Evrard

Board Members:	Mike Cole	Bruce Moss
	Ed Frank	John Probst
	Paul Kooiker	John Zatopa

Newsletter Editor: Jim Evrard

RESEARCH PROGRESS

by Jim Evrard

This article is a summary of the sharptail research project being conducted by Michael Hardy, PhD candidate from the University of Wisconsin-Madison under the guidance of Scott Hall, DNR staff upland game bird researcher in Madison.

The field research began in the cold and snowy spring of 2014 when Hardy and his two assistants conducted visual and auditory surveys on 117 roadside routes in the Northwest Sands. Each route consisted on eight stations spaced 0.5 mile apart with each station surveyed one to three times each during three consecutive 18-day sampling periods. Each sampling period corresponded with the early, middle and late 'lekking' periods. Lekking period meaning when dancing males gather on a dancing grounds to display, hoping to attract a mate.

The research crew conducted over 2,000 surveys, but found sharptails only 25 times (about one percent!). These results might have been due to the poor spring weather. *[Editors note: Survey routes were determined randomly meaning that some of the routes were located in poor sharptail habitat]*. No new leks or dancing grounds were found, but UW, DNR, and US Forest Service personnel collected over 200 feather samples from known leks for genetic analysis.

Most sharptails found were near the Namekagon Barrens Wildlife Area and in Douglas County just north of the 2013 Germann Road fire, an area formerly having high sharptail numbers after the jack pine budworm outbreak in the 1990s resulted in huge areas of clearcuts. The birds were found near permanent open barrens habitat found in established wildlife management areas.

The research project will be continued in 2014 and 2015. Hardy stated that he will be making two substantial changes to the surveys. The first is that they will be using recorded sounds of displaying sharptails to elicit responses from male sharptails along the survey routes. The second change is that he will be moving survey routes into prime sharptail habitat (recently-logged, burned and/or windstorm damaged). These changes should result in a higher detection rate [i.e. more sharptails located].

Hopefully Hardy will attend our WSGS annual meeting in Red Cliff in late April and give us more detail about his research activities.

WSGS WEBSITE

The WSGS website, "wisharptails.org", describes our goals and objectives, projects, members of our board, membership and contact information, and electronic copies of recent newsletters.

Those members wishing to receive their newsletters electronically should check the appropriate line on the back page of the printed newsletter when renewing memberships or contact us at the WSGS address.



Pasqueflower: a harbinger of early spring on the barrens.

WHAT HAVE YOU AS A WSGS MEMBER DONE FOR SHARPTAILS?

by Jim Evrard

The Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society Inc. (WSGS) is a group of people concerned about the plight of the sharp-tailed grouse in Wisconsin. The private, non-profit organization of less than 200 members has donated \$36,000 for sharptails in its 25 years of existence.

What projects have you made possible as a WSGS member? You have contributed \$15,000 to help manage sharptail habitat in the Crex Meadows, Namekagon Barrens, Pershing, Riley Lake and Sandhill wildlife areas. The management effort has varied from buying specialized equipment to clearing, burning and mowing sharptail habitat. This effort has also included censusing sharptails and sponsoring events supporting sharptail habitat management.

You have donated \$10,000 for buying sharptail and protecting habitat in the Crex Meadows, Namekagon Barrens and hopefully in the near future, Douglas County ('Bird Sanctuary') wildlife areas.

Sharptail research has also benefited from your donation of \$6,000 in a range of projects from buying tiny radio transmitters, to genetic analysis of sharptail feathers, to supporting graduate student researchers.

Wildlife education has not been neglected. You have donated \$5,000 to sponsor the sharp-tailed grouse as a species in the Breeding Bird Atlas of the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology; to buy sharptail observation blinds for the Moquah Barrens and Namekagon Barrens wildlife areas; to help finance the construction of the Crex Meadows Wildlife Education and Visitor Center; and to sponsor several sharptail research and management workshops. .

Besides providing funds for sharptails and their habitat in Wisconsin, you have also supported the sharp-tailed grouse by educating and influencing decision-makers in Madison, both within the DNR and within the Capitol building. Be proud of your contributions. Wisconsin sharptails thank you!



Buzz Balser's winter flock of sharptails feeding on white birch buds.

AFIELD WITH ZIGGY

by Tom Ziegeweid



A few weeks back I was ice fishing with a bunch of guys at Chetek, Wisconsin. I was telling them how well I did on ruffies [ruffed grouse] and pheasants from gun deer season to the end of December.

One young participant chimed in that he had never seen so many ruffies during the deer season in his life. He and 17 other members of his deer gang do mostly long drives north and south of HWY 77 east of the Namekagon Barrens. He told me he puts on 45 miles a season walking.

As it turned out after further discussion, his gang saw not only many ruffies, but a lot of sharptails also. I sort of “interviewed” him, and asked a lot of specific questions about his sightings. In summary, he said he saw a lot of small bunches, pretty evenly scattered north and south of HWY 77, and east and west. He said he see a flock of 20, but couldn’t remember exactly where.

They shot 9 bucks out of 18 hunters. These guys are all aged under 40. They put miles on. I wish I could still do that. This makes me wonder if our organization could put postage paid postcards under windshield wipers in that area during the deer season. Post cards would be sighting reports. They had their best luck hunting in transition zones, neither woods nor prairie, and that’s where they saw most of both species of grouse.

Another older 40 something fishing with us has been deer hunting out of a cabin on Little Sand Lake, east of NBWA [Namekagon Barrens Wildlife Area] all his life and usually sees sharptails every year. This year he said they saw a “lot of birds” whatever that is.

After checking my big state atlas, I discovered these sightings are not right on or adjacent to NBWA. In past spring lek counts at NBWA, the numbers jump around erratically and don’t seem to always follow a 10 year cycle.

In conclusion: I really believe there are more birds that we are missing in spring counts. These birds seem to be more mobile than birds on other “island” populations. These barrens areas see more visitors during gun deer season than the whole rest of the year. I’m going to ponder this in my head; how can we tap this survey opportunity with the deer hunters?

Enjoy this nice winter, Ziggy



This image of a sharp-tailed grouse is from *Lewis and Clark on the Great Plains: A Natural History* by Paul A. Johnsgard

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL

**Please check the date on your address label and renew your membership if it has expired or is about to expire.
Dues are the main source of income for our small all-volunteer organization.**

Name: _____
Street/PO Box _____
City: _____ State: _____
Zip: _____
Phone: _____
Email: _____

Would you like to volunteer for:
_____ Board of Directors
_____ Newsletter articles
_____ Other

_____ **Electronic Newsletter (by email)**

Enclosed:

\$ _____ Dues (Regular - \$10, Supporting - \$25, Organization/Business - \$25, Contributing - \$50,
\$100 Sustaining, \$200 Sponsor)

(Dues are fully tax-deductible)

\$ _____ WSGS Logo Decal (\$1.50)

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

\$ _____ Tan or blaze orange Cap (\$15 – indicate color choice)

\$ _____ King Sharptail limited edition print (\$60)

(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 Avenue, Grantsburg, WI 54840

