

WISCONSIN SHARP-TAILED GROUSE SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



Volume 3

Fall, 1991

First WSGS Spring Meeting

Amid a late season blizzard we held our first spring membership meeting on April 12th and 13th. Despite the weather, those who made it were able to get into the blinds and watch the spring dance ritual.

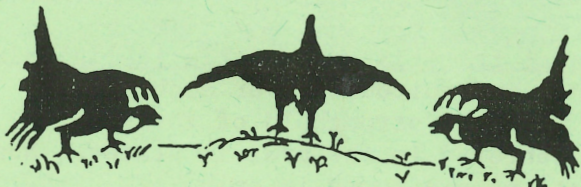
Friday evening we had a good social, got to know each other, ate up each other's culinary efforts, and generally had a good time. On Saturday, after the blindsitters got back, we had a business meeting. We developed draft objectives for the society based in large part on Minnesota's objectives. We want to grow both in numbers and in dollars. It was felt that dues of \$10.00 could increase our treasury and that dues level would probably not discourage many people who are really interested from joining.

We also voted to support the sharptail management questions on the Conservation Congress questionnaire and to support the

DNR in its efforts to secure the Namekagon Barrens future. Elections were held with Tom Ziegeweid of Eau Claire becoming president, Jim Shurts of Madison as Vice President, and Dave Evenson continuing as Newsletter Editor and Secretary-Treasurer.



The Stalwart Few: Standing: Julie Ziegeweid, Keith Bennett, Rita Bennett, Don Bronk, Joe Knight, Myron Anderson, Ken Van Ornum, Frank Vanacek. Kneeling: Tom Ziegeweid, Pete Hahn, Jim Shurts. Not shown: Eldon and Pat Miller.



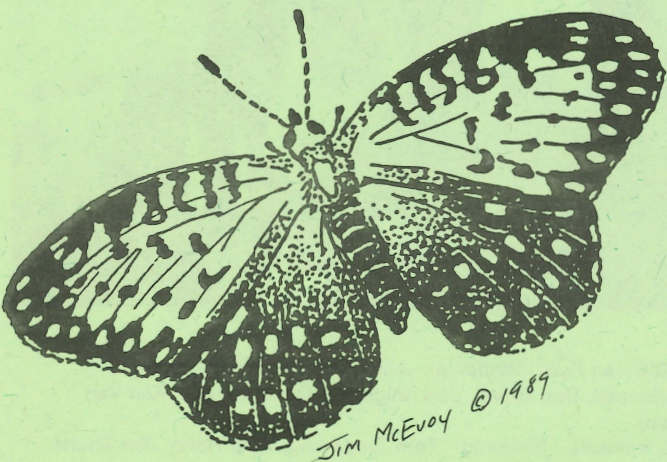
Rare butterflies and moths of Wisconsin

by Les Ferge

The butterfly and moth fauna of Wisconsin is a fascinating blend of species including such diverse elements as relic populations of arctic species in our northern bogs, prairie species approaching their easternmost geographic extent in our prairies, and even migratory species of subtropical origin. Although many species are widespread, often common, and tolerant of habitat disturbance, the majority are specialized to varying degrees, thriving only in the limited areas that satisfy their entire range of often very exacting ecological requirements.

Rare species continue to be found as unstudied areas are surveyed. However, loss of native vegetation such as nearly total conversion of prairie to agriculture has obviously taken a considerable toll. Our rarest Lepidoptera are reduced to existing only in the few remaining acres of intact habitat that have so far escaped the disruption that has come with settlement. We may only guess at what already has been lost.

The loss of open natural areas via forest encroachment and deliberate tree planting is also detrimental to many Lepidoptera. Butterflies are particularly sensitive to this, since even our forest species



Regal fritillary (*Speyeria idalia*), a state-threatened prairie butterfly.

prefer sunny openings, clearings, or edges rather than dense, unbroken woods. Maintaining and promoting native plant life is necessary for the continued well-being of our Lepidoptera, to provide for the needs of each stage of the life cycle, such as larval food plants and sources of nourishment and moisture for adults.

Seven species of Lepidoptera are listed as threatened or endangered in Wisconsin. All are associated mainly with prairie or barrens. Besides being rare in Wisconsin and dependent on the continued existence of scarce natural community types, they also are considerably restricted within North America.

Populations of the Powesheik skipper (*Oarisma powersheik*) are known only from two state natural areas in Waukesha County - Scuppernong Prairie and Kettle Moraine Fen and Low Prairie. It is a highly localized, sedentary species, not straying from the few acres of wet-mesic prairie that support the colonies.

The silphium borer moth (*Papaipema silphii*) is also an inhabitant of wet-mesic prairie. Currently known from only four localities, it is likely to be found in more sites in southeastern Wisconsin. The larva bores into the roots and stems of prairie dock (*Silphium terebinthinaceum*), the only hint of its presence being one or two withered or dead leaves and droppings expelled from a hole low on the stem. The swamp metalmark (*Calephelis muticum*) has long been known from several sites in southeastern Wisconsin, but the failure to relocate populations in some of the known localities has caused some alarm. Its only larval host, swamp thistle (*Cirsium muticum*), occurs in bogs and fens in much of eastern Wisconsin, giving hope that a thorough survey of known swamp thistle localities will uncover more metalmark populations.

The regal fritillary (*Speyeria idalia*) has declined precipitously over much of its range with the stronghold of the species being centered in the prairie states. Now, populations are found in only

Kimberly Clark Wildlife Area

by Cliff Wiita
Park Falls Area Manager

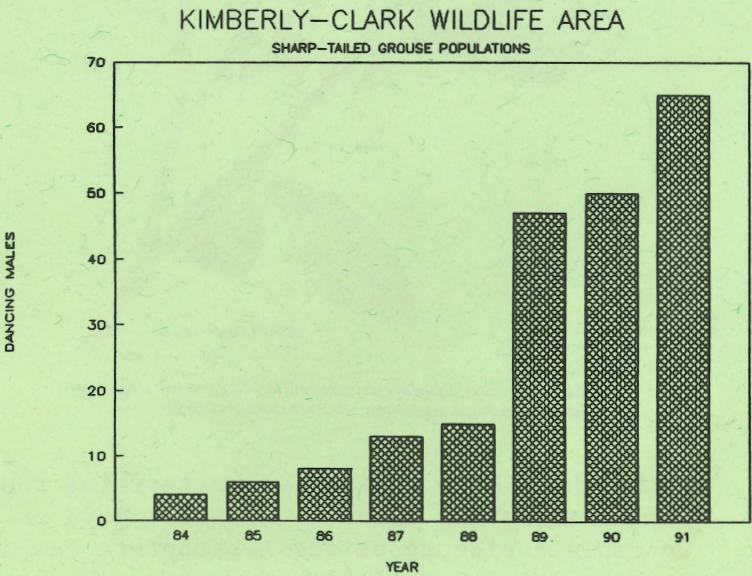
Prior to 1963, the DNR owned about 1,500 acres acquired under the deer yard acquisition effort made in the 40's and 50's. In 1963 Kimberly-Clark Corporation donated 5,160 acres and the DNR purchased an additional 2,000 acres to consolidate the boundary at 8,639 acres. Of that total, about 4,630 acres is sharptail habitat today (including 230 acres of private land in active agriculture on the south edge of the project).

In 1963 the area was 65-70% forested. Two active dancing grounds were located on what is now the "sharptail area" on the project; one of which was on the private ag land on the south edge. A third active display site was located one mile east of our northeast corner on another isolated block of private ag land. There was an agricultural fringe area 1½ to 2 miles further east that also had a few birds that may have winter roosted in the big bog. On the three sites in the

early 60's we had a peak of about 20 males with about half on the site east of our boundary; 6-8 on ag land on south edge; and 2-3 actually on K-C property. In hindsight, I'm amazed that we had as many birds around in the early 60's in such a heavily forested environment! At this time they were on their way down and would have eventually dwindled to nothing as succession moved on.

Of the 4,630 acres about 2,700 acres is upland, 1,700 is leatherleaf black spruce-tamarack bog, and 230 acres is in private agricultural fields. We're at about 85% of development potential. Some additional tree cutting and another good burn on the east unit needs to be conducted to approach 100%. Weather cooperating we should attain our goal in 1991.

We have about 17 miles of completed firebreak, which includes about 4 miles of town road on the west side. Most of the upland was aspen type and the majority has been commercially cut followed by periodic burns, hand cutting of young (4-8 years) aspen and girdling of large scattered mature aspen by inmate crew plus some dozer post-sale shearing. The site has a high water table and mature aspen stocking was about 6 cords to the acre - not very productive. The area was burned over in the mid-30's. The 1938-39 aerial photos show no tree cover except the black spruce-tamarack bogs. Locals say the area then had many sharptails, like a lot of Price County did at that time. An additional 700 acres of the large bog was essentially hand cleared by the inmate crew to add "open" aspect to overall area.



(continued on back page)

Sharptail history: Some use was documented in the early 60's, as mentioned previously. By the mid-70's a few birds were observed on upland sites being opened up by our development activities. Winter roosting in the big bog swamp was observed (18-25 birds) by loggers. By early 80's I would have been hard pressed to come up with any spring display activity. In '84 and '85 we had 4 and 6 cocks respectively. By 1989 we had about 47 total birds active with the majority being cocks. In spring of '90 we came up with very close to 50 cocks on at least 8 difference sites. The spring of 1991 had 65 cocks present. Obviously the results of the past few years are very encouraging. I feel these birds are really tuned into disturbance, of a rather dramatic nature. Down the road a way, when only prescribed fire will be used to maintain habitat, I'm wondering how they will behave?

Also, we are at only 50% of the size stated by Temple to assure minimum viable population. We still have another year or two where some severe disturbance will be occurring, after that just burning.



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