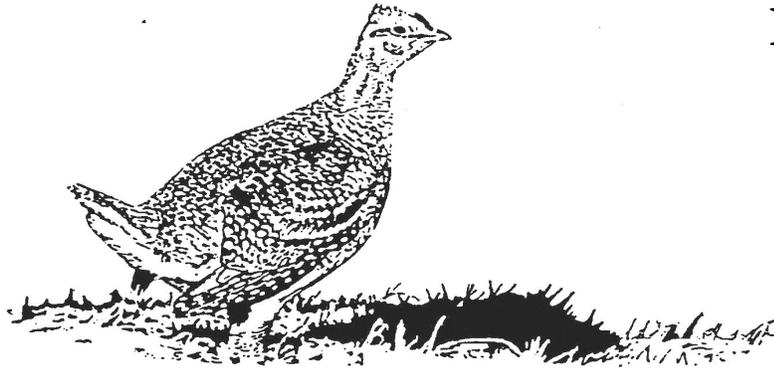


WISCONSIN SHARP-TAILED GROUSE SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



Number 85

Fall 2017

FIRST NOTICE – 2018 ANNUAL MEETING AND ART PRINT RAFFLE

The 2018 WSGS annual meeting will take place on Saturday and Sunday, May 19 and 20. The meeting will be held in the Legendary Waters Resort and Casino in Red Cliff on the Bayfield Peninsula with a field trip scheduled for the Moquah Barrens Wildlife Area, site of the massive cooperative 3-year project to bolster the native sharptail population by transplanting and releasing sharptails from northwest Minnesota. This year the WSGS meeting will take place at the same time as the Chequamegon Bay Bird Festival headquartered in Ashland.

A block of rooms is being held for those attending the annual meeting. Those attending the meeting must make their own room reservations by calling (715) 779-3712 or (800)226-8478. The room cost is \$90. Meals will be ordered from the restaurant menu.

The drawing for the art print raffle will again be held at the end of the annual meeting. Framed limited edition and signed art prints of sharp-tailed grouse (rarely seen in the art world) will be offered. More details of the raffle (featured artists, tickets, etc.) will be available in the next WSGS Newsletter (No. 86). The raffle is a source of a significant part of the WSGS income.

BOARD NOMINATIONS SOUGHT

The terms of WSGS Board Members Paul Kooiker, John Probst, and John Zatopa expire in 2017. Nominations are being sought for three-year terms for the three positions. Any member interested in serving on the Board, and any member wishing to nominate fellow WSGS members to the Board, should write to WSGS Secretary/Treasurer Jim Evrard or call 715-463-2446 or email at grouse.7067@gmail.com.

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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.

FROM YOUR PRESIDENT

By Dave Evenson

Mister President goes on a Road Trip: I set off on a beautiful August Thursday, my wife's birthday by the way. I invited her along, but she demurred. It's a long way to the east end of the Upper Peninsula, but Yoopers don't seem to mind driving 70 where the suggested limit is 55, so I went with the flow and that helped. I drove east along the north shore of Lake Michigan and home again on the Lake Superior side, and on Friday morning, I watched the sun come up over a bay of Lake Huron, all wonderful sights. Driving through the white cedar stands set my thoughts to decoy-carving wood, but I didn't take the time to seek out a backwoods sawmill.

One of my objectives was to see the 9,500-acre Duck Lake Fire of 2012. I stopped in Newberry and talked to a couple of foresters who had fought it. They informed me that it would be about a two hour drive, and after eight hours on the road already and another hour to go, my back decided against it. The foresters had seen sharptails there, so I took their word for it and drove on.

I did stop on the Raco Plain of the Hiawatha National Forest. Steve Sjogren, recently retired from USFS, sent me some good directions and I was able to look that territory well – it's pretty flat, sandy, and looks a lot like many of our Wisconsin Northwest Sands properties. A bonus there – I was able to pick a half a hatful of blueberries in about 15 minutes – pretty late in season and many on the ground, but it was still a great stop.

The area that Michigan has opened for sharptail hunting is the far eastern county and a half of the UP. It's all private land, timothy hay and grazing ground. Because of the lake climate, latitude and heavy soil, they take one hay crop, middle of July. I saw thousands of round bales and hundreds of head of beef cattle. I didn't see any sharptails, but others at the meeting did – birds perched on those bales. This landscape looks a bit like the Ashland airport site, or red clay west of Brule River, but it is more extensive and open than those Wisconsin areas. It's probably more like Rusk County was 30 years ago. No WSGS funds were injured on this excellent junket.

Report from the Michigan Sharp-tailed Grouse Association Meeting: The MSGA met on Friday morning, August 25, at a town hall in the heart of the hayland sharptail hunting area south of Sault Ste. Marie. About 40 people were in attendance, which they said was their largest number ever. The MSGA began, I believe, about the same time as the WSGS, but had fallen off to nothing when John Ries, initial spark plug wasn't able to work on it any more. Recently it is growing, with new officers and about 25 members at this time. There was a tremendous amount of enthusiasm in the room.

Mary Sarrault, MSCA President, gave the welcome and moderated the meeting. Greg Corace, USFWS Biologist from the Seney National Wildlife Refuge, gave us the results of a couple of research efforts regarding survey protocols. The main message from this was that an on-line training session that they had made, worked better for new observers than classroom teaching, because an observer could re-watch, and do so in convenience. The site should be available to us. WSGS should consider using it for our own citizen-based monitoring efforts.

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

Newsletter Editor: Jim Evrard

BOARD MEMBERS:

Mike Cole Ken Jonas

Paul Kooiker Bruce Moss

John Probst John Zatopa

Newsletter Layout/Webmaster: Lauren Finch

Al Stewart, MI DNR Upland Bird Specialist took us through some of the history of sharptails in Michigan. Some people claim that there were no sharptails in the UP pre-logging and certainly if there were any, they were few. They came in from Wisconsin (at one time in the settlement era every Wisconsin county held sharptails). Their first hunting season was 1935 statewide, and they went to the UP only in 1960. The 1990s saw tightening and in 1998 the season was closed.

Dave Jentoft, local DNR biologist talked about the modern hunting era. They do roadside surveys on the hay roads that are found on most section lines and found good numbers throughout the area. With local support, they opened the season in 2010 in about a county-sized area in far eastern UP and expanded in 2015 to about a county and a half. The season runs from October 10-31, two birds per day and a maximum of six birds per season.

Because of the private hay land ownership, they have developed a Hunting Access Program (HAP), wherein the state leases sharptail and other small game hunting access on about 5,000 acres. They'd like more, but are limited by funding. Hunting reports from the 2010-2014 hunts on the smaller zone indicated about 200-400 hunters taking 100-200 birds over that county-sized zone.

This hay and grazing land seems to be sustainable into the future, providing habitat at no cost to the state. I asked about the possibility of row crops coming in, but it seems climate and soil work against that likelihood.

Bruce Bascom reported on MSGA running lek surveys in past years, and also requested new members to join this effort. He also presented some findings of Heather Porter's MS thesis from Michigan State University – 'Resource Selection and Viability of Sharp-tailed Grouse in Michigan'.

The group then toured some HAP lands and had a lunch - I had self-toured the area Thursday night so started for home.

Thank You,

Dave Evenson

MINUTES OF SUMMER JUNE 28, 2017 WSGS BOARD MEETING

By Jim Evrard

The WSGS Board held their summer meeting at the Gordon DNR Ranger Station in the afternoon of June 28, 2017. The original plan was to meet in Douglas County's Gordon Dam Park, but we were rained out. DNR Ranger, Mark Braash, generously offered to host the meeting in the Gordon Ranger Station.

Board members, Dave Evenson, Jim Evrard, Paul Kooiker, Bruce Moss, and Tom Ziegeweid attended the meeting. Board Members Mike Cole, Ken Jonas, John Probst, John Zatopa were absent. Also attending the meeting were former Board Member Ed Frank, retired DNR Researcher Bob Dumke, and Brian Heeringa and Ann Dassow from the U.S. Forest Service.

President Dave Evenson opened the meeting at 1 p.m. with Secretary/Treasurer Jim Evrard stating the minutes of the Spring Board and Annual meetings will be published in the next WSGS Newsletter (No. 84) scheduled to be distributed in July so the minutes were not read.

Evrard then gave the Treasurer's Report. The WSGS checking account balance as of 6/28/17 was \$3,792.52 and the CD balance as of 10/16/2016 was \$2,662.00 for a total of \$6,454.52. The WSGS did not have any financial obligations having granted \$3,000 to the DNR for Namekagon Barrens habitat and \$2,000 to the DNR for Crex Meadows habitat. A \$300 grant was also provided for additional printing of the North-west Barrens brochure needed for use at a Brule meeting for people associated with barrens forestry.

Finances for the cooperative project with the U.S. Forest Service to translocate sharptails from NW Minnesota to the Moquah Barrens WA were given - \$10,949.18 was received from the USFS and \$10,949.18 was paid for outstanding invoices (for trapping equipment and travel expense for the trappers). A balance of \$932.05 from 2016 remains in the account.

Evenson led a discussion of the items discussed at the WDNR Sharptail Committee meeting held recently in Eau Claire. The bottom line is that spring sharptail counts at managed areas decreased to the point where no hunting permits will be issued in 2017. Those present at the Board meeting discussed the need for a science-based method of determining the number of hunting permits and then following that method, not allowing property managers to arbitrarily override the method's hunting permit numbers results. It was suggested that new WSGS Board Member, Ken Jonas, with input by Mike Cole, write a letter to Eric Lobner, new DNR bureau of Wildlife Manager Chief, asking for an explanation of the proposed 'new' method to estimate hunting permit numbers. This process should involve Scott Hull who developed the first method and Mark Witecha, current DNR upland game bird staffer.

Brian Heeringa, wildlife biologist for the Washburn District of the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest and leader of the cooperative translocation project, presented a handout giving a summary of accomplishments this spring. Sixty-seven Minnesota sharptails (22 females and 45 males) were released in the Moquah Barrens. Five cocks and five hens were radioed and are being monitored by a biologist employed by the Red Cliff Band of Ojibwa Indians. Thus far one hen was killed by a predator and a radio failed on another bird. The signals from three other hens were lost. Other birds have been seen on the Moquah Barrens, Ashland Airport, and in the corridor between the Moquah Barrens and the federal fish hatchery land to the west. One hen nested successfully in Douglas County Forest land south of Moquah Barrens.

Paul Kooiker than discussed the \$1,750 DNR grant that was received as a Citizen-based Monitoring project for 2018. The money will be used to pay expenses involved in censusing sharptails in the Moquah Barrens in 2018 by students belonging to the Northland College Chapter of The Wildlife Society.

DNR Barrens Biologist Bob Hanson provided information that DNR Science Services (former Bureau of Research) is mapping all known former and present sharptail leks, at least in the NW Barrens..

The Board decided to recognize DNR Glacial Lake Grantsburg Work Unit Manager Steve Hoffman for his recent sharptail habitat accomplishments (671 acres burned in the fall of 2016, approximately 350 acres mowed and roller chopped in the winter of 2016-17 and 2,789 acres burned in the spring of 2017 for a total of nearly 4,000 acres.

There was a lengthy discussion about the future of the WSGS (need for younger participation and more members, the future of annual raffle; and increasing attendance at the annual meetings). No conclusions were reached.

It was decided to hold the 2018 WSGS in Ashland on Saturday, May 19. The annual Chequamegon Bay Bird Festival is held at the same time (May 17, 18, 19) that may cause a problem (with housing), but may present an opportunity to reach a larger group of potential WSGS members.

The present President, Vice President and Secretary/Treasurer were re-elected by unanimous consent. The next WSGS Board Meeting will take place on September 18-20 at the McNeil 'Lodge' on the Brule River. Final arrangements will be made by Bruce Moss.

The meeting adjourned at 4:30 p.m. WSGS members drove to the Gordon Dam Campground for a social, but were again rained out. They then traveled to the nearby "Lookout" restaurant for dinner. With rain continuing, only Evenson, Evrard and Ziegeweid remained in the campground overnight. Tom joined Dave and Jim for fishing in the mist the next morning before departing for home .

SUPPORT THE WSGS – BUY A CAP

We still have a small supply of embroidered tan or blaze orange caps for sale. The front of the cap features a colorful dancing sharp-tailed grouse under the black letters, WSGS. A strip of camouflage cloth covers the lower half of the cap and extends around the outside edge of the cap's bill. The size of the cap can be adjusted using a sturdy Velcro closure.

The cost of the cap is \$15 (shipping free) and can be ordered by using the renewal form on the back page of this newsletter.

Please indicate the color you desire.



RARE SHARPTAIL/PHEASANT OBSERVATION

By Jim Evrard

On September 1st this year, the opening day of the Wisconsin mourning dove, early teal and early Canada goose hunting seasons, old friend and retired DNR co-worker Jon Bugenhagen and I were scouting the Crex Meadows Wildlife Area (CMWA) for potential hunting spots.

As we were driving on the East Refuge Road just south of the Crex Meadows Refuge, but north of the trail leading to the upper end of North Fork Flowage, I noticed a group of large birds on the road ahead. As my truck approached the birds, it became apparent they were either young ring-necked pheasants or sharp-tailed grouse.

Stopping the truck near the birds, I could tell they were young sharptails. They were nearly adult size, but lacked any visible tail feathers. What was odd was that there was a pheasant rooster in the group, harassing the young sharptails. The strange rooster was very dark colored and it also looked like it lacked the normal white ring around its neck. It seemed to be an adult bird based on its large size compared to the sharptails and its long tail.

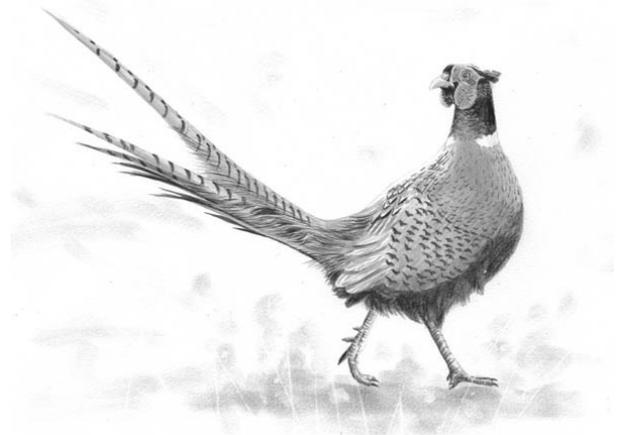
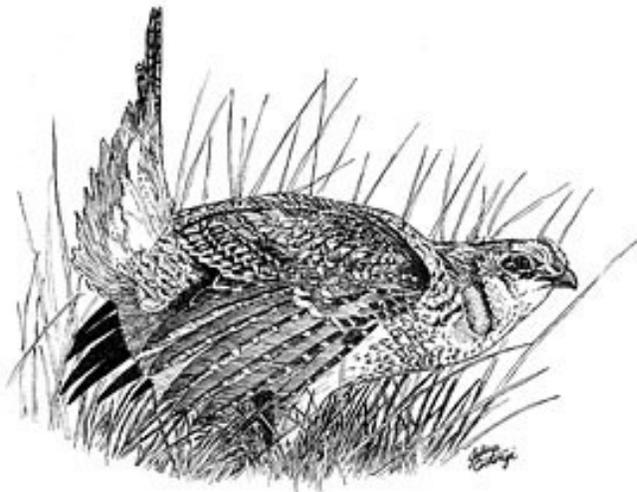
With my truck quite near them, some of the birds ran into the roadside grass on both sides of the road. Seeing they were sharptails, I wanted to count their number. When I opened the truck door, the birds flushed from the grass and flew into the roadside brush prairie. I counted nine sharptails on my side and Jon saw one young sharptail flush on his side of the truck.

Of the sharptails I saw, none looked like an adult bird. That would be a large brood, ten nearly adult-sized young sharptails. And the brood was in a location where I had not seen sharptails in many years. Most of the occupied sharptail habitat is in the north end of the CMWA. This was the second brood I saw this year. When added to several other reported brood observations, it gave me hope that the CMWA sharptail population was recovering from recent low numbers.

There has been concern that the recent resurgence of the pheasant population in our area of northwest Wisconsin, including the CMWA, has negatively affected the sharptail population. DNR personnel at the CMWA observed pheasant roosters attacking sharptails on the sharptail dancing grounds in the spring. Pheasants are also known to be “dump nesters”, meaning they drop eggs into other bird’s nests, reducing the productivity of the parasitized bird. I had personally found pheasant eggs in mallard nests while studying duck and pheasant nesting 20 years ago.

The coloration of the ‘nasty’ pheasant rooster was strange. The pheasant roosters I had previously seen in Crex Meadows had normal coloration. However, I know that the DNR had released other pheasant varieties in the distant past trying to find pheasants that were more adapted to Wisconsin habitat conditions. I also know that there have been illegal releases of pen-reared pheasants in our area to attempt to bolster the wild pheasant population and in dog trial events. The bird could also have been a genetic freak.

Regardless of the pheasant rooster’s presence, Jon and I were fortunate to see a sharptail brood at close range, especially a brood of ten birds!



WISCONSIN SHARP-TAILED GROUSE SOCIETY PROJECTS 2005-2008

<u>Year</u>	<u>Amount</u>	<u>Recipient</u>	<u>Project</u>
2005	\$35	North American Grouse Partnership	Membership support
	\$35	Wisconsin Stewardship Network	Membership support
	\$50	Friends of the Bird Sanctuary	Membership support
	\$125	Wisconsin Wildlife Federation	Membership support
	\$1,300	Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Workshop	Event sponsor
		Total: \$1,545	
2006	\$35	North American Grouse Partnership	Membership support
	\$50	Friends of the Bird Sanctuary	Membership support
	\$50	Friends of Crex	Membership support
	\$60	Wisconsin Wildlife Federation	Membership support
		Total: \$195	
2007	\$225	Crex land acquisition Celebration	Event Sponsor
	\$35	North American Grouse Partnership	Membership support
	\$60	Wisconsin Wildlife Federation	Membership support
	\$55	Friends of Crex	Membership support
	\$50	Friends of the Bird Sanctuary	Membership support
	\$30	Friends of the Namekagon Barrens	Membership support
		Total: \$455	
2008	\$35	North American Grouse Partnership	Membership support
	\$60	Wisconsin Wildlife Federation	Membership support
	\$55	Friends of Crex	Membership support
	\$50	Friends of the Bird Sanctuary	Membership support
	\$30	Friends of the Namekagon Barrens	Membership support
		Total: \$230	

RAPID CITY REVISITED

By Tom 'Ziggy' Ziegeweid

On September 14-19, Roche Lolly and I joined former Duluthite Joe Hapy at his residence on the edge of Rapid City, South Dakota. His home is about 2,000 feet above the city, in the foothills of the Black Hills, with a nice panorama of the city in the early morning hours.

What didn't change from the previous year was the amazing tameness of the wildlife that live in his neighborhood. On Sunday morning I literally walked up slowly to a fawn that was munching on his Joe's bushes. I was probably 6-8 feet away and it was indignant to me being there. It wouldn't shoe away when I yelled at it.

Ditto on the Merriam's turkeys that I could have bagged with a slingshot. An interesting note about Merriam's turkeys is they run a little smaller than our Eastern turkey and the bird's beards are noticeably smaller. Their whitetail deer are noticeably smaller and lighter in color (almost tan) compared to our dark brown deer.

Of note was a new species I added to my life list, a collared dove, there were plenty of them in his backyard. They are an exotic bird from overseas.

The sharp-tail hunt: For the first three days of the season we hunted the Railroad Buttes Recreation Area. We saw around 20 some birds each day. They were really difficult to get close to as it is very dry out there, with the cows munching off what grass there is. Roche bagged the only bird we got. It was a juvenile bird that he actually got close to.

Joe had bumped two coveys of huns (Hungarian or gray partridge) that we chased around for a couple of hours to no avail. I was surprised to see huns here. There were no grain fields in the vicinity, but they thrive in short grass and don't like corn and soybean fields.

We heard a report on the radio about how the various upland game birds are at least 50% down from 2016 in western North and South Dakotas. They have been getting some moisture as of late, but most of the summer they were in extreme drought.

As I write this article, I am packing for our next trip to Ft. Pierre National Grasslands in the center of the state. According to the U.S. Forest Service, the birds are down there too, but not to the degree of the Buffalo Gap National Grasslands birds. There is OK-to-good grass in South Dakota when you go east over the Missouri River to Minnesota.

There were cows near our hunting area, one had recently died. This carcass was attended non-stop by birds and mammals. Turkey/black vultures, coyotes were there in the middle of the day.

As we all know, nothing is wasted in Nature.

More to Come,

Ziggy



MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL

CHECK YOUR MAILING LABEL - The first line in your mailing label is the expiration date of your membership. 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: _____

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

Email: _____ Electronic Newsletter

Enclosed:

\$ _____ Dues (Regular - \$20, Supporting - \$30, Organization/Business - \$25, Contributing - \$50,
Sustaining - \$100, Sponsor - \$200)

\$ _____ WSGS Logo Decal (\$1.50) (Dues are fully tax-deductible)

\$ _____ 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

