

WISCONSIN SHARP-TAILED GROUSE SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



Number 78 Winter 2016

2016 ANNUAL MEETING

Be sure to attend the annual meeting of the Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society (WSGS) that will take place on Saturday and Sunday, April 16 and 17, 2016. The meeting will be held in the St. Croix Inn located on the shores of beautiful St. Croix Lake in the Northwood's Village of Solon Springs.

An average of 28 people that receive newsletters (not all are WSHS members) attend the meeting. It is a chance for members to learn about and have input into the programs and projects that the WSGS is involved with for the benefit of Wisconsin sharptails.

The WSGS Board will meet on Saturday morning in the St. Croix Inn and the annual members meeting will begin at 1 pm. in the Inn's banquet room. The business meeting will end at 3 pm. followed by a program featuring sharptails in northwest Wisconsin. The program will end with a drawing for door prizes and the annual art print raffle. A social will follow prior to the catered dinner beginning at 6 pm. in the banquet room.

An early Sunday morning tour of sharptail habitat in the Barnes-Brule area is planned followed by a group breakfast at 9 am. in an area restaurant, ending the 2016 annual meeting.

A block of 15 rooms has been reserved in the St. Croix Inn at a very reasonable special rate of \$50 per room with a slightly higher cost for a room overlooking the St. Croix Lake. Call the St. Croix Inn at (715)378-4444 to reserve a room. The reservation cut-off date for the block of rooms is April 10th. Check out the St. Croix Inn on the Internet.

There will also be a \$15 per person meeting registration fee that will cover the costs of the catered dinner and beverages and munchies during the meeting breaks. Send the registration fee to me at: Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society, 102 East Crex Avenue, Grantsburg, WI 54840.)

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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 Jim Evrard at the WSGS address or the email address on our website.

FROM YOUR PRESIDENT

by Dave Evenson

The Burnett County – DNR land trade is complete! All the paper work is filed! It's in the books!

I've written before about the origins of the WSGS, how 25 years ago I was in the process of negotiating with the Burnett County Forestry Committee for a new lease on the Namekagon Barrens, and how I looked around and thought "We need some friends". We formed the WSGS to be friends, and the new lease took form. I remember at the time thinking that there would not be another lease needed, by the time that the 25 years were up everyone would recognize the ecological value of the Barrens and it would be easy to come to some sort of deal. Fifteen years later I chided myself, and said how naïve is that – everyone will recognize ecology? But today I can say that my thoughts of 25 years ago came true.

The DNR conveyed 5,672 acres, including all of the Danbury WA, Keizer Lake WA, and forested parts of Crex Meadows and Amsterdam Sloughs wildlife areas plus \$660,750 to Burnett County. In trade Burnett County conveyed 5,040 acres of the Namekagon Barrens WA and 1,322 acres of present County Forest between Crex and the Kohler Peet Barrens on the Governor Knowles State Forest. Burnett County has better blocking of its forest management blocks. They will continue to manage these lands for forest game much as in the present. Restrictive covenants ensure these lands stay in public domain. All lands on both sides of the trades will remain open to public hunting, trapping and fishing.

This is a story long in the marking. It's probably been at least ten years since Pete Engman and Jake Nichols first talked about this, and it's been 3 years since the DNR Board actually approved the trade – a long time in execution. I suppose the story is older than that; the Namekagon Barrens have been leased for 70 years and before that the Hamerstoms wrote *Sharptails into the Shadows?*, much of it focused on the Northwest Sand Barrens.

A couple of years ago the WSGS recognized four people instrumental to this trade. Pete Engman from the DNR and Jake Nichols from the Burnett County Forestry Department were the men on the ground that kept all the parts going. Dave Clausen, Natural Resources Board Chair at the time, and past WSGS Board member, facilitated a great part of this trade, stretching back to the Crex boundary expansion years ago. Dick Steffes, DNR acquisition chief at that time did yeoman work getting appraisals done in quick order, and verifying the right parcels so that the trade could work.

The Friends of Crex, Friends of the Namekagon Barrens and WSGS all worked to help this trade. These groups along with Friends of the Bird Sanctuary all have developed in this quarter century, and we have hopes for a Friends of Moquah Barrens group. Today sharptails and barrens have many friends.

Thank you, *Dave Evenson*

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 Ed Frank
Paul Kooiker Bruce Moss
John Probst John Zatopa

Newsletter Layout/Webmaster: Kim Wheeler

REMINISCING ON PAST SHARPTAIL HUNTING

by Don Bublitz

[Editors note: Don Bublitz is a retired DNR Wildlife Manager living in Lake Namekagon, close to his former office in the Brule Ranger Station . Don had the best office in the state, overlooking the swift-flowing Brule River where he could watch bald eagles fishing for trout, but had to give up his office when he retired. The following article was excerpted from a personal letter Don sent me late last year. Don worked for the Wisconsin Conservation Department (WCD) and the DNR from the late 1950s to the 1980s]

“Your article on STG [sharp-tailed grouse] hunting [in WSGS Newsletter No. 77] sparked several memories. Because I’ve killed so few sharpies in each encounter, it’s easy to recall. In fact, I’ve seen more STG killed in my presence than I’ve bagged in total. Some fine shots come to mind.

Walking in on a Riley Lake [WA] food patch with Cliff Wiita [former WCD and DNR Wildlife Manager at Park Falls] and Wilber Stites (a WCD mouthpiece, very good at PR [Public Relations]) and jumping perhaps a dozen birds. I got off one shot and I’d guess so did Cliff. Wilber downed three!!!

Flushing birds with Jim Hale ([WCD] Game Researcher) at Namekagon Barrens where he killed three in one flush.

Guiding a reporter for Northern States American Field Trial Association in western Douglas County. The fastest gun I’ve ever witnessed.

Walking-up 3-4 birds on a Moquah Barrens food patch and seeing Jim Raber [Don’s former assistant at Brule] make a very long shot.

The first STG I killed was in the early 1950s – must have been a general statewide or northern game season?? I spent a week hunting ruffed grouse and sharptail in the Cable country out of another friend’s cabin. I was home from the Air Force on leave before going to a new assignment in Alaska. The old abandoned potato fields in the Cable/Drummond area were prime habitat.

Mel Ellis and B. L. Dahlberg [Burt Dahlberg was a WCD deer researcher and later a DNR wildlife supervisor in Spooner] were friends. Mel and Burt would camp on the Namekagon Barrens and hunt STG. Looking back as you will too as you get older [I do now]. Mel and Gordon MacQuarrie, through their writing, influenced my choice of a career. I’ve no doubt about that.”

CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

The terms of WSGS Board Members Dave Evenson, Bruce Moss, and Tom Ziegeweid expire in 2016. 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 Jim Evrard or call 715-463-2446 or email at grouse.7067@gmail.com.



Illustration by: Paul Johnsgard

WSGS FINANCIAL STATEMENT

01/01/15 through 12/31/15

Checkbook Balance as of 01/01/15. \$7,206
Certificate of Deposit as of 10/16/14 \$2,626

Total cash assets as of 01/01/15 \$9,832

2015 INCOME:

Memberships. \$2,482
Cap, patch, decal, print sales \$132
Art print raffle/auction \$630
Donations \$200
Certificate of Deposit interest \$17
Total Income \$3,461

2015 EXPENDITURES:

Grants - Namekagon Barrens WA habitat \$1,500
Crex Meadows WA habitat. \$1,000
WSO Atlas - Sharp-tailed Grouse \$500

Total Grants \$3,000

Dues -- North American Grouse Partnership. \$35
Friends of Crex Meadows. \$50
Friends of the Bird Sanctuary. \$50
Friends of the Namekagon Barrens \$50
Wisconsin Wildlife Federation. \$125

Total Alliance dues \$310

Newsletters \$678
Website maintenance. \$63
Office supplies. \$25
Recognition Plaque and gift. \$87
2014 annual meeting. \$224

Total Membership Services \$1,077

Wisconsin Non-profit corporate report. \$10
Raffle License \$25

Total Expenditures. \$4,422

Checkbook Balance as of 12/31/15. \$6,228
Certificate of Deposit as of 10/16/15 \$2,643

Total Cash Assets as of 12/31/15). \$8,871

Liabilities:

2014 Pledge grant for Douglas County WA acquisition . . \$3,000
2016 Pledge grant for Namekagon Barrens WA habitat. . . \$1,500
2016 Pledge grant for Crex Meadows WA habitat \$1,000
Total Liabilities. \$5,500

Submitted by James O. Evrard, Secretary/Treasurer, 12/31/15

SAM COOK'S BOOK

by Jim Evrard

Sam Cook has been the outdoors writer for the Duluth News-Tribune since 1980 and has written several books including *Quiet Magic*, published by the University of Minnesota Press in 1989. The book is a collection of his newspaper columns. One column, *Sharptail Dance*, is an account of a spring visit to the Crex Meadows Wildlife Area to watch dancing sharp-tailed grouse.

When the book was published in 1989 there were more sharptails in Crex Meadows than there are now. At that time the more-numerous sharptails had consistent dancing grounds or leks where the DNR had erected small canvas-covered viewing blinds that the public could rent. Now with a much smaller sharptail population, the cocks consistently use only a few inaccessible leks and they move about apparently following hens.

Regardless, Cook wrote an interesting story of the Crex habitat and inhabitants and the mating behavior of sharptails.

He wrote "A predawn wind stirs across the Wisconsin prairie. With the breeze comes a distant honking. 'Geese,' someone whispers in the dark. But we haven't come to see geese, and we hurry on. Down the dirt path. Across the prairie stubble. Into the blind. Through two slits in the canvas blind we are looking at a tiny patch of the 30,000-acre Crex Meadows Wildlife Area near Grantsburg, Wisconsin. This isn't just any patch of prairie. This is where the sharptail grouse dance.

"They dance here every morning from before dawn until midmorning or later, from late march until mid-May. If you lucky enough to reserve a blind, if you don't mind rising at 4:30 on a frosty morning, and if you make your approach on quiet feet, you will see the dance. And you will never forget it

"We do not see the grouse arrive. Suddenly, in the gray half-light, they are just there. Twenty feet in front of us." He describes the dance, "the tail goes straight up toward the sky. The wings flare out and curl down to the ground. The bird's head is thrust forward, and a patch above its eye unfurls, revealing a canary-yellow strip . . . Finally, a walnut-sized sac appears to inflate on the bird's neck and takes on a pulsating purple cast."

Cook wrote that the sharptail's calls are "part turkey gobble and part dove coo – a throaty, chortling sound that seems to come from inside the bird rather than out its beak. Then there is the strutting. The sharptails zip around stomping their little feet up and down so fast they blur. All that stomping on the prairie sod runs together and creates a subtle buzzing. With heads stuck forward and wings in hover mode and tails erect, the birds scoot around.

"It is only the males who do the dancing in sharptail social circles. The females are somewhere nearby, out of sight, watching all of this. Once moved, they fly in, mate with a male of their choice and leave.

"But after watching for a while, we can see that each bird is defining his own little territory. The territories may only be a few feet across, but each bird knows where his ground stops and his neighbor's starts. If he forgets, his neighbor quickly reminds him with a puffy – but nonviolent – confrontation.

"As if choreographed by some unseen director, the birds all coo and strut for 30 seconds or so, then idle down. After a quiet period of 15 seconds, they go at it again. Often the birds seem to dance in pairs, facing off on territory lines, zipping back and forth in unison."

That is one of the best descriptions of the sharp-tailed grouse mating behavior that I've read. If you're interested in seeing this spectacular sight next spring, the DNR maintains observation blinds in the Namekagon Barrens and Douglas County wildlife areas in Burnett and Douglas counties that can be used by the public for a small fee.

Contact the Friends of the Namekagon Barrens Wildlife Area at <http://www.fnbwa.org/>, or the Friends of the Bird Sanctuary (Douglas County WA) at <http://fotbs.org/> for more information and to make reservations for the blinds.

A GOOD SHARPTAIL READ

by Jim Evrard

I recently read an interesting book, *Wingbeats and Heartbeats*, written by Dave Books and published in 2014 by the University of Wisconsin Press. The 211-page, hardcover book is about upland bird hunting and related gun dogs. The author was raised in Central Wisconsin, but has wide hunting experience.

The book is divided into three sections: Upland Tales, Helpers in the Hunt and People and Places. I found the fourth story in the Upland Tales section of interest to sharptail hunters and supporters.

The story title, Snowbelly, was a term used by a western rancher to describe the sharptail, referring to its snow-white belly when seen flying from below. The author states in the first paragraph, that many people still call the sharptail a “chicken”, continuing a long tradition of lumping sharp-tailed grouse and prairie chickens together, collectively calling them “chickens”.

The author gives the history of sharptails, especially in the West, beginning with Native Americans and pioneer cattlemen and continuing with homestead farmers and market hunters. Books writes of his personal hunting experience with sharp-tailed grouse from Saskatchewan to Montana, Wyoming, the Dakotas and Nebraska. He talks of hunting sharptails in early September when the broods have not yet broken up and are vulnerable to hunters and their dogs. Later in the fall, the grouse gang up in large flocks and are difficult to approach to within shotgun range.

Books concludes the chapter by nostalgically looking into the embers of an evening campfire and seeing vast buffalo herds, the Lewis and Clark Expedition on the Missouri River, and a homesteader heading toward his sod hunt with an old hammer shotgun in one hand and a sharptail in the other.

The final two sections of the book deal with hunting 13 other upland game bird species, from woodcock to Gamble’s quail to blue grouse to ring-necked pheasant. There is an interesting chapter on the prairie chicken with the author’s mention of Fred and Fran Hamerstrom and the role they played in preventing the prairie chicken from disappearing from Wisconsin. The last section focuses on Book’s hunting partners and interesting people he met in his bird hunting quest.

For those interested, a few copies of *Wingbeats and Heartbeats* are still available in the Bog Shoe, the gift shop located in the Crex Meadows Wildlife Education and Visitor Center, 102 E. Crex Ave., Grantsburg, WI 54840 (the same address as the WSGS).

SUPPORT THE WSGS – BUY A CAP

We still have a small supply of embroidered tan and 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.



AFIELD WITH ZIGGY

by Tom Ziegeweid



I can't wait to try this recipe as I have a lonely wood duck in the freezer and a sorta-shot-up ruffed grouse I will use together. This is a great recipe for your filleted duck breasts from the recent season, or even goose.

If you get some coots next fall, by all means fillet the super large gizzards in them and add to the sauté mixture. Don't let anybody tell you coots are awful to eat!

Years ago we used to eat them occasionally, and they are great.

Some changes I would make to this recipe include: shrimp with no-tails, frozen okra; if you find fresh okra it will be icky in Wisconsin, most of the year. [The recipe came from a book, *Wild at the Table*, written by S.G.B. Tennant]

Poulet d'Eau Gumbo with Shrimp (serves 4)

2 cups of American coot [sharptail?] breasts, skinned and cubed.

2 cups shrimp, raw, shelled, tails on

4 tablespoons olive oil

½ teaspoon red pepper flakes

3 bay leaves

1½ teaspoons dried thyme

4 tablespoons butter

4 tablespoons flour

½ cup onions, finely chopped

½ cup green peppers

2 garlic cloves, chopped

1 cup fresh okra, trimmed and cut into 1" chunks

1 cup scallions and green tops

3 quarts water

In a heavy 5-6 quart Dutch oven make a brown roux on the top of stove by combining butter and flour over low heat, stirring constantly until mixture foams and takes on a rich nut-brown color.

Add onions and stir until they soften. Add garlic, green peppers and okra to mixture and stir to combine.

Over high heat add water in a thin stream, stirring constantly to bring mixture to a boil. Reduce heat, add bay leaves, red pepper and thyme, and simmer for 1 hour.

Meanwhile, heat olive oil in a skillet, sauté coot [sharptail] cubes until they show a bit of color on the edges, then add coot [sharptail] and olive oil to the simmering gumbo. About 20 minutes before serving, add raw shrimp and continue simmering. Serve gumbo over rice.

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

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

«Date»
«First»«Last»
«Street»
«City» «State» «ZIP»

