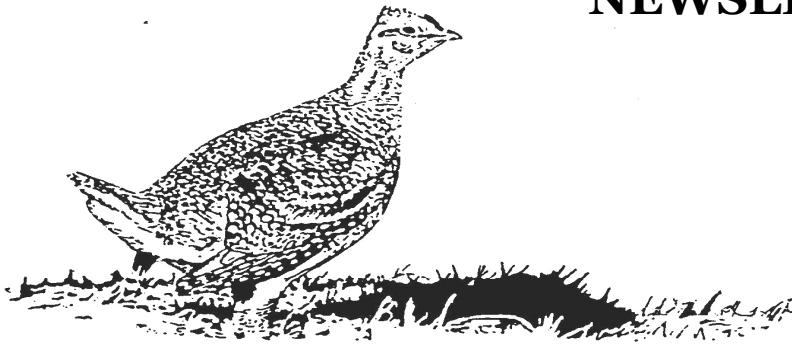


WISCONSIN SHARP-TAILED GROUSE SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



Number 76

Summer 2015

SPRING SHARPTAIL NUMBERS

by Jim Evrard

Sharptails apparently have increased in some parts of Wisconsin's sharp-tailed grouse range. Examining sharptail numbers provided by Scott Hull, DNR-Madison, show that the number of displaying male sharptails in the Namekagon Barrens Wildlife Area this spring were at a modern high. A total of 81 displaying cocks were counted (Table 1) representing nearly half (44%) of the sharptails counted in the entire state. Reasons for this dramatic increase can only be speculative, but certainly welcome.

Sharptails in the Douglas County Wildlife Area, also known as the "Bird Sanctuary" also increased compared to previous years (Table 1). There was also some apparent recovery in the Riley Lake Wildlife Area although the number of birds shown in Table 1 in 2014 and 2015 were counts of total birds, not just displaying males. A rule of thumb is that approximately 75% of the sharptails seen in the spring are males.

The increased number of sharptails seen in the fall and winter of 2014 in the Crex Meadows Wildlife Area reported in the last WSGS Newsletter carried through to this spring. Due to better weather this spring, there were three area-wide censuses made in the huge wildlife area looking and listening for sharptails. Steve Hoffman, the newly-appointed Crex Manager, reported that the number of displaying or dancing male or cock sharptails increased from 5 in 2014 to 16 this spring. For the first time in years, there were several dancing grounds or leks that cocks used somewhat regularly.

This sounds like a significant increase, but the 2014 estimate of 5 cocks was admittedly low and incomplete due to poor spring weather (wet and cold) that allowed only one area-wide census. Even with a half dozen or so active and retired DNR biologists participating, adequately covering the 26,000-acre Crex Meadows is difficult, especially when sharptails are fond of displaying in the huge (and very wet) sedge marshes. By comparison, the Namekagon Barrens is only about 5,000 acres in size and is high and dry barrens habitat with a few, small wetlands making it easier to adequately census.

Another additional bit of good Crex news is that 1,554 acres were prescribed burned this spring, a significant increase from recent years. With the line of supervision more clearly defined with Steve Hoffman becoming the Crex Property Supervisor, we look forward to significant burning in the future.

The Barnes Fuelbreaks in the Bayfield County Forest also showed an increase in the number of displaying male sharptails, nearly doubling over the previous year. Keep in mind, however, small numbers mean more variability in the estimates.

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FROM YOUR PRESIDENT

by Dave Evenson

Twenty-five years ago I was negotiating the renewal of the lease for the Namekagon Barrens, and it wasn't going too well. I needed some friends. I knew that Minnesota had a sharp-tailed grouse society and thought we could have one too. After a newsletter sent to a hundred or so sharp-tailed grouse hunters, dancing ground blind sitters and wildlife managers brought in some response and dues, we were off and running. A dozen or so people met at Holcombe; Eau Claire Leader Telegram outdoor writer Joe Knight nominated Tom Ziegeweid to be our first president. Tom's mouth gaped a bit, but he agreed. Jim Shurts volunteered to be vice-president and got us through the non-profit hoops (a deed for which I am eternally grateful) and we were ready to go and grow.

Over the years the WSGS has become a respected advocacy group for the barrens and for the birds. We have taken positions on land use decisions wherever we thought we could make a better landscape for barrens species. We have weighed in on the Barnes Barrens, Crex expansion, Pershing boundary and Crex acquisition, various state forest plans, the Lyme St. Croix Forest easements and the Namekagon Barrens expansion.

We will never be a funding juggernaut and that's not really our goal. But over a quarter of a century even modest donations add up. A few thousand dollars from WSGS can be matched many times over towards land management or acquisition. We try to be a partner wherever we can towards our goals.

We know sharptails fluctuate in their populations. It seems to me that politics, weather, disease or other factors that affect sharptails fluctuate as well. Wallace Grange wrote *Wisconsin Grouse Problems* in 1942, concentrating on habitat changes in central Wisconsin, and the Hamerstoms published *Sharptails into the Shadows?* in 1952.

The '50s seemed to be a time of awareness and a good deal of conservation wrangling, as wildlifers got Crex Meadows, Namekagon Barrens, Douglas County WA off the ground despite general public and forestry interests in replanting the cutover. 1956 saw a jack pine budworm outbreak in the Northwest Sands. Timber markets and harvest techniques were different then, but it could have been a boon to sharptails in that area.

Sharptails seemed to have been pushed to the back burner during the 1960s and 1970s although the faithful sharptail managers were continuing the cause, seemingly without much support from the public or higher-ups. Phil Vanderschagen, a northern wildlife manager raised the issue in 1975 as he published a document showing the continuing loss of sharptail range.

WSGS was born in a good time for sharptails. The 1990s had a tremendous amount of salvage timber harvests throughout the heart of the jack pine budworm outbreak. Kimberly-Clark WA came on line in the heavy soil of Price County, and wildlife managers and rangers were becoming more adept at prescribed burning.

Here our 25th year seems to be a hopeful time for barrens and sharptails as well. Some of our wildlife areas are seeing good numbers of dancing males. The Barnes Barrens rotational plan is getting underway, across the county line from the major Lyme-St. Croix Forest easement. A million dollar private lands program has just begun on the red clay farmlands near Lake Superior. The biggest project we have going today is a cooperative effort to work towards bringing new birds to Moquah.

We are proud and happy to be in our 25th year, and we thank you, our members for being on board as we keep sharptails from slipping into the shadows.

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 Bruce Moss

Ed Frank John Probst

Paul Kooiker John Zatopa

Webmaster: Kim Wheeler

...Sharptail Numbers cont. from p.1

The remaining three managed properties (the Pershing, Moquah Barrens and Kimberly-Clark wildlife areas) that still have sharptails have such low numbers that the species is in danger of disappearing.

Apparently transplanting female sharptails from old Deer Management Unit (DMU) 2 to the Pershing Wildlife Area was unsuccessful in boosting the population. In the distant past, sharptails were also translocated from Crex Meadows to the Moquah Barrens and were apparently successful in boosting the sharptail population there for several years, but then their numbers have dropped to dangerously low levels.

Sharptails in unmanaged properties have declined drastically, especially in DMU 2 due to the reforestation of the huge open area that resulted from massive jack pine clearcuts caused by the jack pine budworm outbreak.

Table 1. Displaying male sharptails in Managed and Unmanaged Properties ---

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
<u>Property Managed:</u>									
Namekagon Barrens.	51	47	36	43	21	40	42	56	81
Douglas County	28	28	41	36	42	25	25	23	31
Riley Lake	25	27	37	31	15	33	25	19*	27*
Crex Meadows	45	40	24	20	16	24	14	5**	16
Barnes Fuelbreaks	15	16	27	n/a	n/a	6	8	10	19
Pershing	28	27	20	14	9	3	7	5	3
Moquah Barrens	6	3	6	7	5	6	3	4	3
Kimberly-Clark	9	10	10	11	n/a	8	n/a	3	4
Dike 17	2	1	1	0	0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Subtotal:	209	199	202	162	108	145	129	125	184
<u>Unmanaged:</u>									
DMU 2*	173	241	178	79	66	27	28	53	53
DMU 9*	33	27	19	9	9	9	1	1	2
Rusk County ***	n/a	64	56	39	26	25	22	12	9
Subtotal:	206	332	253	127	101	61	51	66	64
State-wide Total:	415	531	455	289	209	206	180	191	248

*Total bird count (75% males)

**Incomplete census (only 1 area-wide count, rather than 3)

***Parts of DM Units 19,24 and 2

On May 26, the DNR Sharp-tailed Advisory Committee reviewed the spring population counts and determined limited sharptail hunting will resume this year after being closed in 2014. Based on the spring counts, the committee recommended a quota of 100 hunting permits for DMU 8 (the Namekagon Barrens WA and the south half of the Douglas County WA lie in that DMU). With a total of 112 displaying males in the two wildlife areas, the 25-displaying male threshold was reached triggering a hunting season. The deadline for the hunting permits is August 1, with applications available online and at DNR license outlets.

The DMU 2 count (53 males) was also above the threshold, but no permits were recommended. The new habitat created by the 2014 Germann Road wildfire might boost the number of sharptails in that area.

2015 WSGS ANNUAL MEETING

by Jim Evrard

The 25th annual meeting of the Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society was held on Saturday, April 25, 2015 at the Red Cliff Casino Hotel near the tip of Wisconsin's Bayfield Peninsula. WSGS President Dave Evenson welcomed 25 persons to the gathering. All members of the WSGS Board of Directors were present with the exception of Paul Kooiker.

Secretary/Treasurer Jim Evrard gave his reports. Minutes of the board and annual meetings have been published in the WSGS newsletters so were not read. WSGS cash assets totaled \$8,034 as of April 13, 2015 minus the \$3,000 pledge for land acquisition in the Douglas County Wildlife Area. This does not include the CD total, the permanent funds of the WSGS. The assistance of Friends of Crex Coordinator, Kim Wheeler, in the publication of the WSGS newsletter was acknowledged by a gift certificate presented to her by President Evenson.

Evenson gave a short review of WSGS activities and accomplishments for the past year. This included the summer board meeting at the Pershing Wildlife Area, a fall board meeting on the Brule River and lobbying for the restoration of the Natural Resources Board's power, full funding of the Stewardship Fund, and restoration of DNR scientists that Governor Walker had eliminated in his proposed 2015-2017 state budget (*Editor's note: the Joint Finance Committee of the Legislature restored the NRB's powers, the Stewardship funding was approved at a reduced amount, but the DNR scientist positions were lost*) (*Editor's biased note: is the Governor a true "friend of the Sportsman"?*).

The 21,000-acre, public access, no development, improved management (for barrens) easement from the Lyme-St. Croix forest holding company needs only the Governor's signature to become a reality. The proposed land trade between Burnett County and the DNR needs only final U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service approval to become reality (*Editors note: the land trade was approved in mid-May*). This land owned by the DNR and being managed as forest will be traded for county land that is and can be managed as barrens for sharptail habitat. This includes the Namekagon Barrens Wildlife Area leased from Burnett County and land owned by Burnett County between Crex Meadows and the Kohler-Peet Barrens in the Governor Knowles State Forest to the north.

Bob Hanson, DNR Northwest Sands Biologist, gave an interesting presentation about his work to connect managed barrens properties supporting sharptails with habitat "stepping stones" largely owned by counties and industrial forests. Bob also stated an anticipated change in the DNR's silvacultural handbook that dictates forest management can benefit barrens habitat for open-loving species like the sharptail.

Bob said a recently approved federal grant meant to support plant pollinators will promote a U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and National Park Service cooperation (the St. Croix-Northwest Sands collaborative) that could help sharptails.

Michael Hardy, a PhD candidate from the UW-Madison, conducting sharptails research funded by the DNR, gave an update on his project. In 2014, he and his assistants conducted randomly-chosen roadside transects, but found sharptails in only 1% of the samples. This year so far with only half of the surveys completed and with improved censusing techniques (tape recorded playback calls, censusing only probable sharptail habitat, etc.) sharptail detections have doubled. Hardy's study ends in 2016.

Todd Naas, DNR Wildlife Biologist from Ashland, gave more details about the Lake Superior Habitat Initiative. Todd's work is centered in the Lake Superior Clay Plain and uses the federal Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) to fund habitat work for four featured species, the sharp-tailed grouse, the Kirtland's warbler, the golden-winged warbler and the brook trout. Compromise is needed in this project since the habitats of these species are not always compatible. There is nearly a million dollars available in each year of the three year project.

The biologists hope that the sharptails in the Lake Superior Clay Plain will be able to mix with those birds in the Moquah Barrens due to a corridor existing between the two habitats along existing pipeline and power line right-of-ways.

Tom Doolittle, Chequamegon National Forest's Washburn Ranger District Wildlife Biologist, discussed his role in efforts to keep viable and increase sharptails in the Moquah Barrens. A recent vigorous habitat improvement program coupled with a planned translocation of sharptails from northwest Minnesota to the Moquah Barrens in 2016 will hopefully allow the population to recover to a level that will insure its future survival.

The Moquah Barrens sharptail management program began in the 1950s in cooperation with the then-Wisconsin Conservation Department. Today the U.S. Forest Service has management responsibility for the Moquah sharptails. The expansive and intensive prescribed burning program is being monitored and evaluated by U.S. forest Service Plant Ecologist Matt Bushman who gave the assembled WSGS members an interesting presentation.

The annual meeting ended at 5:00 PM with drawings for door prizes and the raffled art prints. After many years of trying, former WSGS President Ed Frank finally had the lucky ticket drawn for the Owen Gromme flushing sharptail print. Surprisingly, Ed's lovely spouse, Deanne had the lucky ticket for the Buzz Balser print of sharptails feeding on white birch buds in the winter. Bruce Moss won the Louie Raymer print depicting Crex Meadows displaying sharptails. Since Bruce already had a framed Raymer print, he graciously donated his prize to the Friends of the Namekagon Barrens for their use at their summer meeting.

Many of those in the audience then moved to the hotel room of Jim and Shirl Evrard for pre-dinner snacks and beverages. Most of those in attendance ate dinner as a group in the hotel dining room.

The following morning a few WSGS members were led on a van tour of the Moquah Barrens by Tom Doolittle. Another group was treated to the same basic tour in June, 2014. So ended the 2015 annual meeting of the Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse Society.

FORGOTTEN PREMIUMS

by Jim Evrard

While looking in some past records, I found the list of premiums that the WSGS offered in hopes of encouraging membership. I have to admit I forgot the premium list. The list included an embroidered WSGS cap for a \$50 membership fee; a Louie Raymer print for a \$100 membership; a Buzz Balzer print or a Ruth King print for a \$200 membership; and finally, the choice of any of the three prints plus a life membership for a \$300 membership fee.

If any member who has paid a \$50, \$100, \$200 or \$300 membership since 2012 and would like the premium their membership fee entitles them to, please contact me. I do have the membership list with fees paid so know the number of possible premiums. The Raymer and King prints are in color, signed and numbered with the Raymer print featuring spring sharptails in Crex Meadows and the King print depicts dancing sharptails in the Namekagon Barrens. The Balzer print is in color and is signed but not numbered and features a flock of sharptails feeding on birch buds in the winter. The Balzer print is different in that it is reproduced on canvas paper, making it appear as an original oil painting.

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.

MINUTES OF WSGS BOARD MEETING

by Jim Evrard

The WSO Board of Directors met on in the Red Cliff Casino Hotel on Saturday, April 25 prior to the 2015 annual meeting. Board members present were Mike Cole, Dave Evenson, Jim Evrard, Ed Frank, Bruce Moss, John Probst, John Zatopa, and Tom Ziegeweid. Paul Kooiker was absent. Others present were Dave Clausen, Tom Doolittle, Bob Hanson, and Scott Walters.

President Evenson called the meeting to order at 9:00 AM. Evrard gave the Secretary/Treasurer's reports. Minutes of both Board and Annual Meetings were printed in the newsletters. Newsletter costs have been reduced by 50% over the past several years through publication of the newsletter at Crex Meadows with the assistance of Kim Wheeler, Friends of Crex Coordinator.

As of April 13, 2015, membership stood at 172. Over 50% of the paying members contribute more than the minimum membership of \$10/year. A motion was made, seconded and approved to increase the \$10-minimum and \$25-supporting and business membership levels to \$20 (minimum) and \$30 (supporting and business).

As of April 13, 2015 the WSGS checking account balance was \$8,407 and the CD balance as of October 16, 2014 was \$2,627 for a total of \$11,034. The \$3,000 pledge for land acquisition in the Douglas County Wildlife Area would reduce the total to \$8,034.

The funding request by the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology for \$2,500 to sponsor the sharp-tailed grouse in a second edition of the Wisconsin Breeding Bird Atlas was denied, but a motion to grant the WSO \$500 to sponsor the sharptail was made, seconded and approved. It was decided not to grant the \$2,500 requested because that money could be better spent on projects that would benefit sharptails more directly than the Bird Atlas. It was also decided to ask the WSO for any sharptail data they might have and also ask the International Crane Foundation (annual spring crane counts) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Survey (annual breeding bird transects) if they could also provide any sharptail data they might possess.

Nancy Christel submitted a grant request for \$3,000 to partner in an \$80,000 habitat improvement project in the Namekagon Barrens WA (restoring barrens in the newly acquired Plum Creek land). It was decided to grant her \$1,500 prior to 7/1/15 and another \$1,500 prior to 7/1/16. Steve Hoffman also submitted a grant request for \$2,000 to partner in a \$164,400 habitat improvement project in Glacial Lake Grantsburg (GLG) with \$1,000 requested prior to 7/1/15 and \$1,000 prior to 7/1/16.

Evrard asked if any clearing would mimic natural barrens communities by clumping mature trees left on the landscape rather than spacing them regularly giving the appearance of a city park that has little value to sharptails. A motion was made, seconded and passed granting the two requests under the conditions stated above.

Bob Hanson, DNR Northwest Sands Biologist, spoke about a new federally funded project to conserve pollinators in the St. Croix River and Lake Superior watersheds in Wisconsin. He asked the WSGS for a letter of support for the project where he envisioned the creation of "stepping stones" for sharptail between managed barrens habitats. The motion was made, seconded and approved to provide the letter of support.

Ed Frank led a discussion about Phase II of the Lyme easement project (the Governor's signature is all that is needed to finalize the project); the land trade (cont.p.6) between the DNR and Burnett County (needed approval by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service due to PR dollars used to buy DNR wildlife lands) that will perhaps be given in May (*editors note: the land trade was approved in late May*); and the possibility of using student fire fighters from UW-Stevens Point in the prescribed burning program in Glacial Lake Grantsburg (the DNR has showed little interest).

The summer WSGS Board meeting might be held in late August in Grantsburg to examine the prescribed burning program in GLG. It was suggested that the WSGS prepare an "issue brief" to submit to the DNR Wildlife Policy Team. A motion was made, seconded and passed to ask the Policy Team to meet with WSGS in Grantsburg to discuss the issue.

Tom Doolittle, wildlife biologist in the Washburn District of the Chequamegon National Forest, distributed an issue brief that he had presented to the WDNR Sharp-tailed Grouse Committee, WDNR Wildlife Policy

Team, Minnesota DNR, and Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Society. The project needs Tom Hauge's signature (USFS has had M.O.U. with WCD in 1950 and modified in 1965). The Lake Superior Watershed group received a federal grant of \$84,600 for sharptail translocation and \$225,000 for habitat work. Good cooperation was experienced with WDNR's Scott Walter and MDNR and MSGS. A translocation plan is needed. Michael Hardy will do the genetic work.

The project needs a non-government partner (WSGS) to handle finances. Tom will develop a draft cost-share process agreement and retired WDNR biologist and WSGS member Fred Strand will coordinate. The grant funds will need weekly disbursement. The federal government will electronically transfer funds to the WSGS before the WSGS will write the checks. A motion was made, seconded and passed to enter into a challenge/cost-share agreement with the USFS to translocate sharp-tailed grouse to the Moquah Barrens Wildlife Area. The board meeting ended at 12:15 PM.



SHARPTAIL PUBLICITY

by Jim Evrard

Tom Davis, Wisconsin outdoor writer, contacted me several months ago asking about a source of sharp-tailed grouse photos for an article he was writing for the *Our Wisconsin* magazine. I provided some names and recently he contacted me saying that his article, *Sharptails Still Dance In the Barrens*, was published in the April-May 2015 issue of the magazine. Tom was gracious enough to arrange sending several copies for distribution at the annual WSGS meeting.

Davis was a member of the first WSGS Board of Directors in the early 1990s. He was also instrumental in writing and securing funding for our attractive color membership brochure.

Tom is a noted writer in the outdoor world. He lives in Green Bay and writes for a variety of outdoor publications and has published several books. My favorite, *Tattered Autumn Sky*, contains stories, many centered in Wisconsin, of a variety of upland bird hunting with his dogs.

His *Our Wisconsin* article focuses on the crazy mating behavior of the sharp-tailed grouse. Davis explains how sharptails differ from the other three grouse species native to Wisconsin. He also gives that boom and bust history of the bird in the state.

Tom states that the last stand of the sharptail in Wisconsin is primarily in the northwest part of the state. He mentions the Moquah Barrens, Douglas County, Namekagon Barrens, Crex Meadows and Pershing wildlife areas.

Davis quotes Tom Dolittle, U.S. Forest Service wildlife biologist in charge of the Moquah Barrens Wildlife Area in Bayfield County regarding the ongoing management program there. Tom also suggests contacting DNR wildlife biologist Nancy Cristel in Spooner if anyone would like to watch dancing sharptails from a blind in the Namekagon Barrens Wildlife Area. He also gives the WSGS some publicity by giving our website address. Thanks Tom!

AFIELD WITH ZIGGY

by Tom Ziegeweid

The Current Status of Central Wisconsin Sharptails

This past May 5th I headed down to Babcock, WI to hook up with some of my past and present duck camp cronies to turkey hunt the fourth season.

That Tuesday afternoon, Pat Otteson and I went for a scouting run and he showed me where he had seen birds the previous two weeks. One of the spots was our friend Leo Brostowitz's cranberry bog south of Babcock. I liked the fact I could drive up on the berm [a cranberry-bed dike] and set my blind up, and not have to "fight the brush" when I walk in the dark to get there the next morning. So I set my gear up and was thinking how nice this spot was.

The next morning I got up early, had my coffee and snacks and headed to my blind. In a little over an hour of legal shooting time I had bagged the biggest tom of my life. This was the first bird I have ever shot in Central Wisconsin in the spring. Our group has hunted there for around seven or eight years.

So I bagged my bird on Wednesday morning, and wasn't planning to go home until Saturday morning. So what was I going to do to keep busy while my pals were out hunting? I decided to go scouting, snooping around, interviewing everyone who I knew from that area that might have seen sharptails recently or in the past. Some of my contacts were growers who had graciously let us tramp their property at least a decade ago when we had our last spring meeting and survey at Sandhill [Wildlife Area] (early 2000s).

On Thursday morning I headed to the Sandhill office and had a spirited conversation with Neal Paisley and his technician Kori about many subjects, sharp-tails included. The last confirmed sighting was by Kori in spring 2013, which was a lone bird she bumped north of the Ball road while putting up boundary signs. This was fairly close to that lek that Ed Frank and I had seen a few birds a long time ago. If I remember correctly this was an old established lek from the past on the dike berm.

Later that day, I stopped to talk to John who was Dennis Potter's bog technician. Dennis let us on his land when we last surveyed [looking for sharptails] that area. John knows the bird well, but hasn't seen one in at least seven years (maybe longer). I asked him to give my regards to his boss, and thanked him for his information.

Next step was the machine shed on Kirby Rice's bog by Bear Bluff. I talked to two of his techs, and it was the same-old, same-old. Either of them hadn't seen a sharpie for a long time, seven to ten years. But they were perplexed by the abrupt sudden disappearance of the birds in one year, after seeing twenty to thirty consistently for a number of years. Kirby let Dave Evenson and me tramp his property during that last survey, and I explicitly remember him telling us that the birds mostly disappeared in one year. Bear Bluff is large with more high ground than the rest of the area. Around 2002(?), I personally saw a flock of twenty-two birds, two consecutive weeks in December when I was down there late season grouse hunting.

I think that sighting was the impetuous for our last survey. I remember Kirby telling us that those birds I saw on those two occasions on Cranberry Road were invariably his Bear Bluff flock.

An afternoon trip that day to Necedah [National Wildlife Refuge] got me two cards with phone numbers of the manager and the biologist who were both out in the field. The next morning, Friday, I called Brad Strobel from my cell phone, the head biologist who replaced Rich King. He recognized my name from "Afield with Ziggy" as he is a WSGS member and very interested in sharptails.

We had a lengthy discussion about lots of issues. He had never heard of a sharptail sighting since he has been at Necedah. He was not aware of the alleged sighting(s) by that USFWS burn boss I talked to two years ago this May. I had previously mentioned that in this article. Brad related to me that the last "chicken" seen on Necedah was a hybrid in 2002 (sounds like Crex). The last confirmed sharptail sighting was in 1996. I did get my red-headed woodpecker "fix" at Necedah, maybe saw the same bird the gal at the desk saw the day before. They had just arrived from the south.



After Friday I ventured down the Amundson Road to the residence of David Amundson, who I was told has always enjoyed his ‘chickens’ on his expansive property. This moss farm and cranberry operation is literally a habitat bridge between Bear Bluff and Sandhill. I had a great discussion with him. What he told me made nothing but sense. He had birds consistently for years. He hadn’t seen a bird for at least six to seven years, if not longer.

At least a decade ago they once had a thaw in the middle of winter, followed by rain, fast freeze-up and than bitter cold temps for an extended period of time. The snow on the ground was rock hard. He thought that this did the birds in. They couldn’t snow roost. Probably hindered some feeding activity. That next spring they were essentially gone. If I recall, I think he had around ten to twenty birds on and in an average year.

The next week I called Scott Krultz who is the wildlife technician at Black River Falls (BRF) DNR. He has been there a bunch of years. He hasn’t seen one sharptail in at least the last six to seven years, namely at Dike 17. About that long ago, BRF DNR had a spring survey, pretty extensive according to him, encompassing Dike 17 and a lot of private land.

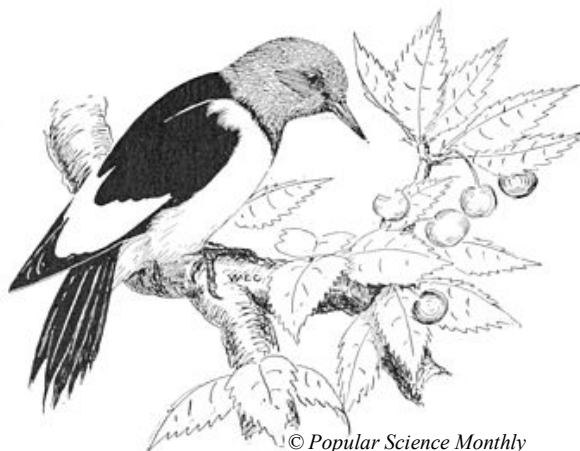
They found no birds! They are still doing habitat work at Dike 17 but the surrounding area is overgrown.

Last Saturday June 6th, I went to my nieces high school graduation in Oconomowoc, WI. Her grandfather and uncle have a cabin at City Point on Highway 54. They both told me “about a decade ago” they were both driving down the Ball Road east towards Sandhill and flushed two consecutive coveys of sharpies near the road.

As I have digested (with heart burn) all this anecdotal data from years ago to present, I have come to these conclusions:

1. Sharptails are probably extinct in this whole area.
2. If there are any surviving at this moment, they could be one to four individuals; I would bet they would be on the Wood County Wildlife Area, along the Ball Road.
3. There is no real regular biological basis for this super-crash, post 2000, other than this ice storm theory (i.e. loss of habitat due to succession, goshawk influx, big fire, small local population as per Martha’s vineyard heath hen demise). Let me compare Central Wisconsin to Riley Lake (Wildlife Area): both are really isolated populations with a pathetic satellite side population (dwindled or gone) with Dike 17 and Kimberly-Clark (Wildlife Area) respectively. The birds are doing very well at Riley Lake due to the efforts of the (U.S.) Forest Service to set back aspen succession. The area that encompasses Bear Bluff, northeast thru Amundson property to Wood Co. Wildlife Area is a rather large area that is interconnected. There is not a real significant “fast succession” problem here. In a nutshell, the cranberry growers have kept the land open, black spruce and tamarack grow really slow, and the DNR has burned the Ball Road area pretty regularly (including this year). Almost all the people I talked to had a fair to modest amount of birds around for years and they mostly disappeared around the same time.
4. Before this crash, I would estimate there were 30-40+ birds in this complex. Probably on par with Riley Lake.

Ziggy



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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 - \$30**, 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

WSGS
102 East Crex Avenue
Grantsburg, WI 54840

