

Michigan Department of Conservation
Game Division Report #1057

by G. A. Ammann

The 1949 Grouse and Woodcock Season

The following is a report based on summaries by nine district game supervisors in regions I and II and on my own observations during the 1949 hunting season.

REGION I

Hunting pressure was slightly higher than last year, heaviest on opening week-end but diminishing considerably thereafter. Most non-resident and downstate hunters had left by the end of the first week although a few crossed the straits on the 14th to catch the opening in the Lower Peninsula. There were probably more local hunters and they hunted more than in previous years because of the closed-down iron and copper mines in the west end.

Weather conditions were more favorable than in previous years. The heavy windstorm on October 10 stripped all the trees bare of leaves, making wing-shooting easier, but also making it more difficult for road hunting as most of the wood roads were blocked by fallen trees.

Most of the hunters contacted were fairly well satisfied, with the exception of road hunters who thought there should be more birds (along the roads) in spite of estimates that 70-80 per cent of the hunting was done by car on the opening week-end.

Practically everyone thought there were more ruffed grouse than last year except those who based their conclusions on the size of the coveys flushed. This is not a good criterion, however, because the broods break up sometime either before or during the hunting season. This year they apparently broke up earlier than usual, and mostly prior to opening day, so groups of more than 3 or 4 ruffed grouse were the exception. The more universal distribution and occupation of more varied types of cover than in past years was quite noticeable and seems significant.

Nearly everyone agreed that there were more sharptails but after the opening day or two they were wild and difficult to secure. Drummond Island showed little change from last year (in number of birds) and it was the only place where there were fewer hunters. On all other areas more hunters and more birds were reported.

Woodcock did not seem to be much different from last year although I found them in a great variety of habitat and gained the impression that they were well distributed as were the ruffed grouse. Even on rocky Drummond Island I found more than I had ever noted before. I do not believe there was a definite flight but more of a slow, general southward movement. I found them abundant on October 14 in Mackinac County and I still heard and saw a few almost every day while hunting deer on Drummond Island from October 29-November 5.

The ruffed grouse kill will probably be considerably higher than last year, sharptails somewhat higher and woodcock about the same. Prairie Chickens were practically a non-entity as a game bird. We know of 6 taken near Seney and 3 southeast of Pickford.

REGION II

Hunting pressure was evidently heavier than last year, due both to local and down-state hunters, particularly on the second and third weekends, possibly because many preferred pheasant hunting the first week-end. Hunting conditions were somewhat better than last year and most hunters were quite well satisfied. The reported increase in ruffed grouse over last year was generally better than we expected and the kill will likely be well over last years' and even better in proportion to that in Region 1. The birds were evidently not as well scattered as in the Upper Peninsula for some large coveys were reported.

Woodcock reports varied greatly. Some had excellent luck and others found only a few birds in the usual places. The kill will probably be about the same or less than last year but I believe it will be way under a true indication of the actual population. There was something peculiar about the woodcock migration but it isn't possible to determine just what did happen. I believe they migrated over a broader front and over a longer period, and stopped in more unusual locations than they did last year. I did notice that some of the hunters' questionnaires indicated excellent woodcock shooting on the west side (Lake, Mason and Newaygo counties) while at Rifle River the kill was almost cut in half from last years' kill.

CHECKING STATIONS

The results of the first day on Drummond Island are shown below compared to last year. The final reports have not come in yet.

	<u>Number of Hunters Checked First Day</u>	<u>Number of Sharptails Bagged First Day</u>	<u>Sharptails Bagged per Hunter</u>
1948	143	80	.56
1949	91	83	.91

The age ratio of birds shot was 1 adult to 1.6 immature, or about the same as in previous years.

On the Bullock Ranch near Seney 230 cars were tallied the first three days and a computed 485 sharptails and prairie chickens were taken. Of 219 birds checked there were 163 sharptails, 50 ruffed grouse and 6 prairie chickens. The age ratio of sharptails was 1 adult to 3 immatures, which is very good. No comparative data from last year is available.

The results at Rifle River for the past two years are as follows:

	<u>Number of Hunters</u>	<u>Ruffed Grouse Shot</u>	<u>Woodcock Shot</u>	<u>Ruffed Grouse Shot per Hunter per Day</u>
1948	276	84	31	.30
1949	346	116	18	.33

The game kill on Neebich Island was recorded by the ferrymen this fall. During the first three days 41 hunters shot 78 ruffed grouse, or an average of about 2 birds per hunter per day. No previous records are available for comparison.

RUFFED GROUSE BREEDING SUCCESS

The age ratio of 342 ruffed grouse specimens examined this year was 1 adult to 3.7 immatures, which is the best on record, the average for the previous ten years being 2.5 immatures per adult. The percentage of birds still moulting during hunting season this year was the lowest in the past 5 years, indicating that the nesting

Following is a comparison of the results:

1945:	22.1	per	cent	moulting
1946:	12.0	"	"	"
1947:	26.6	"	"	"
1948:	9.5	"	"	"
1949:	8.9	"	"	"

GAA:bm

12/8/49

1949 Hunting season summary (Ruffed grouse, woodcock, sharptail, and prairie chicken)
(Compiled from District Game Managers' Reports)

REGION I

District Number	Hunting Pressure	Comparison of Pressure throughout season	Factors Affecting Hunting Season	Reaction Among Hunters	Abundance Compared to Last Year			Kill Compared to Last Year			Additions
					R.G.	St.	W.C.	R.G.	St.	W.C.	
1	5% increase on R.G. 15-18% on Sts.	Downstate hunters fell sharply after first week. Local hunting mod. Heavy throughout season.	Uniformly favorable weather conditions. No leaves after first week.	95% satisfied.	Same	More	More	Much Greater	Greater	Some-what Greater	More J Flocks most c
2	Somewhat up. Probably mostly residents About same downstate and non-residents	Heaviest on week-ends	70-80% road hunting. Hunters took fewer birds than they thought they should as a result			More		Up quite a little	About same	Prob. about same	
3	Slightly heavier: Both local and downstate	Very little difference; downstate hunters thinned out by last week-end.	Foliage down early weather favorable	Did not find the birds they expected	More	More	Same	Greater	Greater	?	Nearly pin w. Larger in a g. probab. of hun in eve case R
4	Local: About same or slight increase. Downstate: less	Heaviest first week-end; light there-after	Leaves dropped earlier. Sharptails better distributed.	Satisfactory. Newberry area only place where R.G. more abundant as expected.	Same	More	Same	Same	More	Same	3 prairie Pickfords

1949 Hunting Season Summary (Ruffed grouse, Woodcock, Sharp-tail, and Prairie Chicken)
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Region II

District Number	Hunting Pressure	Comparison of Pressure throughout Season	Factors Affecting Hunting Season	Reaction Among Hunters	Abundance Compared to last year		Kill Compared to last year		Additional Comments
					R. G.	W. C.	R. G.	W. C.	
5	Heaviest ever seen both local and downstate		Majority not getting limit due to usual complaints. Lack of food caused birds to scatter.		More plentiful most successful season in many birds years.	More plentiful (mostly native)	25-30% higher	Same or less.	3 reports
6	Local: Up 25% Downstate: up 10%	Heaviest first day & last 2 weeks.	Found in more open country - usual. Birds well distributed.	More birds Season O.K.	50% increase, or more	25% increase	50% more	15% more	4-7 birds per season. Recommend October 10-15 of 4. No reports 2 c.
7	Heavier - both local and downstate	Heaviest on week-ends	Dry, many old roads passable & general weather conditions better.	No complaints or unfavorable comments	Definitely more	Few seen after first week-end. Believe flight came through earlier.	More	Less	Reports 2 c.
8	30% greater due mainly to more hunting. Both local and downstate.	Heaviest on week-ends & Thursday afternoons. (Stores closed)	Shooting visibility better-early frosts and high winds removed leaves earlier.	Well pleased. Limit trap common.	30-40% increase	Same or slightly more.	50% greater.	10% greater	Coveys large. Parasites m
9	More than last year	Heaviest on week-ends many downstate hunters commuting, particularly the second week-end.	Leaves came off earlier. Not as dry as previous two years.	Better frame of mind & quite enthused	Best in Clark Co. Gladwin close behind. Hunting success better.	Fair numbers. Believe no main flight but steady southward movement.		Down	Moult complete. Broods pretty scattered but sites more numerous. Hunters report found them examined. Q. eye worms.