MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION
Game Division

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THE 1959 GROUSE SEASON, WITH PROSPECTS FOR 1960

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Hunting conditions were poorer than average last fall, for there was an unusual amount of rain and snow in most of the northern part of the state. Precipitation averaged nearly 5 inches, or 2-1/4 inches above normal, during October. In the Upper Peninsula, snow accounted for more than 3 inches of the total; in many areas it blanketed the ground much of the time from October 24 to the end of the season--virtually ending the season for most hunters. In addition, in the eastern half of the Upper Peninsula and in the northern Lower Peninsula heavy ground foliage and abnormally late leaf fall further dampened the hunters' enthusiasm. The annual hunters' mail survey showed that pat hunters hunted only an average of 5.0 days in 1959 compared to 5.6 days in 1958, despite a general increase in grouse populations in 1959.

The wild fruit and nut crop was generally good, except for acorns which were below normal in abundance.

The response from grouse cooperators again was good; more birds were bagged in fewer hours:

	1958	1959
No. of cooperators reporting	151	149
Total hours of hunting	5791-1/4	5201-3/4
Birds bagged by species		
Ruffed grouse	1438	1470
Woodcock	673	842
Sharptail	161	76
Jacksnipe	66	22
Totals	2338	2410
Average no. bagged per hunter	15.5	16.2

Ruffed Grouse

1. The 1959 season. Following is a summary of ruffed grouse flushed per gun hour by cooperators, compared to the computed kill figures obtained from the mail survey for the past two seasons, by zones:

	Birds Flushed Per Gun Hour		Computed Total Kill	
	1958	1959	1958	1959
Zone 1 (Upper Peninsula)	1.15	1.37	185,850	200,530
Zone 2 (northern Lower Peninsula) . . .	2.05	2.79	150,200	138,740
Zone 3 (southern Lower Peninsula) . . .	2.32	2.68	32,210	40,000

Both sets of figures agree in showing an increase in Zones 1 and 3, but disagree on Zone 2. The drop in the computed kill figure in Zone 2 was due largely, we believe, to the fact that this district showed the greatest decrease in average number of days of hunting (13 per cent). It's quite likely that the cooperators' figures are a more reliable indicator of actual populations than the computed kill figures.

The map shows the cooperators' flushing success figures by counties. Most of the counties with the highest figures in 1958 again showed an increase in 1959. The consistently good hunting in the southern-most two tiers of counties in Zone 2 is interesting, for if hunting had any influence on grouse population trends it is here (nearest to population centers) that one would expect poorest hunting. The same is true, perhaps even to a greater degree, in Zone 3 where there has been a steady increase in grouse hunting success during the past several years--almost equaling that in Zone 2 last fall. The Zone 3 records (of grouse flushed per gun hour) were obtained almost entirely from the relatively small state game areas which are probably hunted more heavily than are northern Michigan lands, despite a shorter open season.

On Beaver, Bois Blanc, and Drummond islands, there seemed to be little change in grouse hunting success from the previous year or two. High and Garden islands (in the Beaver group) were open to grouse hunting, but few birds were taken because of the remotness of these islands and the difficulty of hunting due to the heavy foliage.

2. Prospects for the 1960 season. Four entirely separate surveys this spring and summer (drumming counts, opinion polls of Department personnel and selected sportsmen, brood counts, and mail carrier counts) all indicated a drop in Upper Peninsula grouse populations as compared to last year. It thus appears that we're in for a temporary setback in the Upper Peninsula, though our prediction could be wrong--perhaps unusual weather and cover conditions this summer made it more difficult to see the birds.

In the northern Lower Peninsula all of the surveys except the mail carrier counts indicated more birds, so we can confidently predict generally better hunting this fall. These surveys are not refined enough to forecast trends for smaller areas.

Sharptails

Little change was noted in sharptail populations in the Upper Peninsula last fall. Sharptail hunts by cooperators totaled only 260 hours for an

average of 3.18 birds flushed per hour compared to 3.26 in 1958. Birds seemed down somewhat in the Ewen-Matchwood area but about the same as in 1958 in other major areas. Drummond Island was closed, but some fine shooting was reported in the farmlands of eastern Chippewa County. On the Kingston Plains in northeastern Alger County they have shown a steady increase. Sharptails are still pretty much of a trophy species and are sought after mainly by the most ardent upland bird enthusiasts.

Dancing ground checks this spring indicated little change in sharptail numbers in the Upper Peninsula. On Drummond Island there was a moderate increase, and the season will be reopened this fall. Hunting will also be legal for this species on Neebish and Sugar islands, where there are small colonies of sharptails, as well as in the Soo area, where prairie chickens are now entirely gone. We should have fairly good sharptail hunting this fall.

Sharptails have increased their range in the Lower Peninsula in recent years, so there's a possibility of having a limited open season again in the near future. Prairie chickens, however, are continuing their downward trend; this spring's survey revealed only 37 colonies, of which only 17 had 5 or more males on the dancing ground.

Other Species

Woodcock were as abundant as ever last fall. Cooperators flushed .58 per gun hour compared to .49 in 1958. These figures seem low because the hours include time spent hunting ruffed grouse, woodcock, and jacksnipe. Only sharptail hunting time is computed separately. The computed kill was 64,460 compared to 62,430 in 1958. Courtship ground counts this spring indicated a slight increase.

Shoreline conditions were not conducive for jacksnipe last fall on some of the major concentration areas, so fewer of this species were taken.

Michigan's first Hungarian partridge season was held in Chippewa County last fall. The short (4-day) season plus unfavorable weather conditions resulted in a very light kill. Another limited hunting season will be held on this species this fall.

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Ruffed Grouse Flushed Per Gun Hour By Cooperators
1959