

Report on Sharptail Grouse in the
Fletcher Area and Vicinityby
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This report is based on a field trip from Sept. 20 - 29, 1944. The primary object of which was to make intensive reconnaissance of several Sharptail release sites, namely, the Fletcher Area, Hartwig Pines, and DeWaard. Observations and information on Prairie Chickens was a secondary objective.

At this season of the year, when the birds are undergoing their molt, and insects, wild fruits and greens are still plentiful, it is usually difficult to locate Sharptails unless one is acquainted with their habits in each particular "range". Since their activities seem to center around the dancing grounds, a special effort was made to locate additional ones not yet known. Once a dancing ground is located it is a comparatively easy matter to find at least some of the birds in that area at this season of the year.

In addition to the intensive antics in the spring the Sharptails seem to go through some limited antics at other seasons of the year as well. I have noted Sharptails cackling on their dancing grounds both in the fall and in winter, for a short time, on cold, clear mornings, just after sunrise. Thus, in the only two suitable mornings during the entire time, I was successful in locating Sharptails comparatively easily, by this method.

Fletcher Area

The Sharptails have apparently become established quite well in the vicinity where they were released, and have probably spread out in all directions where they found suitable habitat. Their center of abundance seems to be in Section 33, T 25N - R 5W, a little over a mile south of the point of release, where two dancing grounds seem to be well established. Here there seem to be at least two different flocks totalling at least 30 birds. Among these I noted what I thought were young birds, as judged by their tameness and the fact that their tail feathers were not fully grown (still hidden under the tail coverts).

The habitat seems to be excellent in this area, apparently a combination of the best features of several good Sharptail "ranges" I have known in the Upper Peninsula. Wild fruit is abundant and crickets and grasshoppers were noted quite plentiful. The chief species of fruit bearing plants, noted that are quite likely used by Sharptails, are Thornapple, Blueberry, Choke Cherry, Oak, Black Chokeberry, Wild Raisin and Blackberry.

About 3 miles to the east of the area mentioned above, in Sec. 1, 24-5 Tubbs and Dayton have located a Sharptail dancing ground. Russell Martin and John Devering saw what they believe were two flocks (8-10 birds each) of Sharptails along the road in this area, about the third week this September.

Farther east and south, about 12 miles from the Fletcher area, there are apparently some Sharptails established between Houghton and Higgins Lakes. Dayton shot one in Sec. 21, 24-4 last year and, I heard them cackling in what

I believe is the same clearing. He has also seen them in Sections 35 and 36 (24-4) and I heard them cackling and flushed 2 in the extreme northeast corner of Section 36 (24-4).

All of these Sharptails probably ^{originated} emigrated from the birds released at Fletcher and is an illustration of how they may well have dispersed into suitable habitat in other directions from the point of release.

The Prairie Chicken population is quite apparently on the decline in the Fletcher area, as evidenced by records and reports of the past few years. As an illustration of the comparative scarcity of this species witness the total of my observations on the two species of chickens in this vicinity (Fletcher area and south east):

Sharptails 76 (85.4 percent)
Prairie Chickens 13 (14.6 percent)

The identity of the Sharptails was not always certain when larger flocks were flushed, but in these instances I believe most of them were Sharptails. There may, therefore, have been a few more Prairie Chickens than indicated by the ratio given above.

DeWaard Area

No Sharptails or signs of any, were noted in the vicinity of the release site in Sec. 28, T 28N - R 4W. However, a farmer by the name of Ray Murphy, reported seeing Sharptails in the edge of the woods adjacent to his farm, about a mile and a half north of the release site early this fall. He saw a flock of 8-10 on two occasions and has flushed an occasional single bird. This man, noted Sharptails near his barn shortly after the birds had been released in March, 1934 and after talking with him I believe that he can distinguish Sharptails from Prairie Chickens and Ruffed Grouse.

Hartwig Pines Area

Again no Sharptails were noted in the locality of their release but some Sharptails have recently been discovered in a clearing about 2 1/2 miles north of Grayling. Since this is only about 3 to 4 miles from the Hartwig Pines release site, it is most probable that these birds originated from this planting.

A young Sharptail was found dead on the road by Farley Tubbs on August 22 and a group of 5 was seen at close range along the road by Conservation Officer Clarence Roberts, of Grayling, who is well acquainted with this bird.

Conclusions

The Sharp-tailed Grouse plantings at Fletcher have established a very satisfactory population, and there is evidence that they have been the source of outlying colonies in suitable habitat within at least a 10-12 mile radius. The habitat is apparently excellent for Sharptails, much less suitable for Prairie Chickens.

The Sharptail plantings at the DeWaard and Hartwig Pines Areas seem also to have been successful. The birds apparently have established themselves a short distance from their release sites, possibly somewhat more suitable habitat.

There is a great deal of good Sharptail habitat, in my estimation, in the vicinity of the several release sites. Much of it seems to be in its optimum condition (as regards density of brush) for Sharptails at the present time - much of it too dense already - so that I believe management measures should be taken as soon as, and whenever possible, in order to insure the future of the Sharptail population there.

Prairie Chickens seem to be diminishing in numbers, probably due to the changing environment. Smaller flocks are noted and in some areas they are reported to have disappeared.

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