

MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION

Game Section

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Preliminary Report on the December 1964 Grouse Season in Zone 3

by
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Summary

The extension of the ruffed grouse season in Zone 3 in 1964 created little stir among the hunting public in general, and was extremely well accepted by those who love to hunt grouse. As predicted, the extended season resulted in relatively little increase in overall hunting pressure and in the grouse kill. While it attracted some newcomers to the sport, and some grouse were shot incidental to rabbit hunting, even veteran grouse hunters, as a group, did not do any more hunting--they simply tended to spread it out over the longer time available. This trend seems desirable since it lessens competition among hunters on any given day and allows them a wider choice of dates and weather conditions.

Few Michigan hunters who live more than a county north of the Zone 3 border, and few hunters from out-of-state, took advantage of the December season.

There had been apprehension among some that grouse would be too vulnerable in December--that they could easily be shot out of trees or tracked down in the snow. This problem did not materialize. Many hunters were surprised that grouse generally were more difficult to find, and to bag, than they had supposed--at least when there was snow on the ground. Dog work was more erratic. And since the birds generally retreated into the densest cover--to conifers where available--it was also more difficult to get decent shots. On the other hand, frozen swamps, marshes, and lowland woods allowed hunters to reach country that was difficult to get to or was inaccessible in the early season.

The extra season was quite timely. As predicted, grouse populations in Zone 3 apparently had not declined as they had in Zone 2. The birds were at least as abundant as last year; in fact, some of the counties along the northern border of Zone 3 produced some of the best hunting in the state.

Even the weather-man cooperated, for at no time was the snow so deep as to prevent hunters from driving back roads to reach hunting grounds, or to restrict walking in the woods. The unseasonable thaw in late December was particularly favorable, especially to hunters with dogs.



Sources of Information

Tentative conclusions given in the preceding summary are based on four sources:

1. Personal experience, contacts with hunters, and letters received.
2. Written and verbal reports from Department field men.
3. Detailed hunting records of Grouse Cooperators.
4. A post-card survey of randomly selected grouse hunters.

Grouse Cooperators' Records

The grouse cooperators' records are most interesting, because many of these people are among the most dedicated grouse hunters in the state. This is amply illustrated by the fact that these cooperators, on the average, hunt more than twice as much as the average Michigan grouse hunter.

Following is a summary of pertinent facts from 198 cooperators whose reports have so far been received for the 1964 season:

*Of 99 residents in Zones 1 & 2, only 4 (4%) hunted in the December season.

Of 99 residents in Zone 3, 67 (67%) hunted in the December season.

61 residents of Zone 3 who hunted in both 1963 and 1964 averaged:
14.3 days of hunting in 1963
14.6 days of hunting in 1964 (11.7 days in early seasons;
2.9 days in December)

Thus, these 61 cooperators (collectively) did not hunt significantly more in 1964 than in 1963, even though they had 38 per cent more hunting time available.

Post-Card Survey

In order to obtain facts and attitudes of the average Michigan grouse hunter pertaining to the 1964 season, we surveyed 244 Lower Peninsula grouse hunters whose names were picked at random from the 1963 small-game hunting licenses. Although we do not consider the survey completed, following is a preliminary summary based on an 80 per cent response:

*Of 28 residents in Zone 2 who hunted grouse in 1964, none hunted in December.

*Does not include residents of counties which extend into Zone 3 (Bay, Midland, Isabella, Mecosta, Newaygo, Muskegon).

Of 96 residents in Zone 3 who hunted grouse in 1964, only 34 (35%) took advantage of the December season.

These 96 residents of Zone 3 averaged only 5.9 days of hunting (4.7 days in early season; 1.2 days in December).

No figures are yet available for comparing the number of days that Zone 3 resident grouse hunters hunted in 1963 as against 1964. It hardly seems likely that if the grouse cooperators did not hunt more in 1964 than they did in 1963, the average hunter would do so. It is probable, though, that the extra season induced some hunting of grouse by those who would not otherwise have done any during the season. However, no figures will be available on this point until the 1964 small-game hunting survey has been completed.

The most revealing information of this special survey comes in answers received from the question--"Do you have any comments about current grouse hunting regulations?"

Of the 43 Lower Peninsula residents who hunted grouse in 1964 and commented on existing regulations:

- 8 suggested longer seasons
- 28 believed them OK as is
- 6 suggested shorter seasons
- 1 suggested closing the season for 5 years

Eighty-one Lower Peninsula residents who hunted grouse in 1964 made no comments, so we assume that they had no strong negative opinions about the present regulations.

From this sample it appears, therefore, that at least 84 per cent of the hunters favored current regulations, including the December season in Zone 3.

Samples of Comments Received

"The season is too short."

* * *

"I like the December season--but would like to see it extended from October 1 to December 31."

* * *

"The December shooting was great. Keep it up."

* * *

"Endorse highly the December season in Zone 3."

* * *

"Would like to see December season in Zone 2."

* * *

"I think that the special December season is a fine idea. I was unable to take advantage of it because of school work. I hope to next year."

"I like the new regulations. Hunting pressure was light where we hunted."

* * *

"I think the December season is a fine thing. I couldn't take advantage of it this year because of sickness in the family."

* * *

"If I would have had time, I would have liked the December season."

* * *

"I am happy that the season is as long as it is and especially the additional time in Zone 3. This is great for those of us who cannot hunt very frequently."

* * *

"I think the December season was a good thing for us farmers. We don't have much time in October for hunting."

* * *

"The additional days to hunt pats was very good because it gave me a chance to hunt on Christmas vacation."

* * *

"I like the new season. Saw a lot of grouse. I was too busy to get out for more than 3 hours all season. I hope for extended season next year."

* * *

"Good bag limits--Excellent seasons--Please continue them as they now are. I like the December season very much."

* * *

". . . I feel it is a good thing and will give hunters an extra chance and additional days to get out and enjoy nature while hoping possibly to bag another grouse."

* * *

"The late season (Dec. 1 to Dec. 31) makes the grouse hunting a lot better. You see more grouse and they aren't hunted as much."

* * *

"The birds fly so fast I never can get any of them."

* * *

". . . hunting the last month is a real challenge."

* * *

"I think your Dec. 1st season stinks. The birds don't stand a chance. Soon now you will have the grouse as scarce as the pheasants."

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