

MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION  
Game Division

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The 1962 Grouse Season, with Prospects for 1963

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Mail Survey Results

The estimated 1962 kill of ruffed grouse was 548,200, a 15 per cent increase over 1961 and the highest since 1953. The estimated woodcock kill was a whopping 118,580, the highest on record for the second straight year. Of considerable interest are the continued increases in both ruffed grouse and woodcock taken in the southern one-third of the state. Nearly half as many ruffed grouse were taken here as in either of the other two zones, and 40 per cent of the woodcock were shot in this zone in 1963. We believe this trend is a result of improved habitat and ever-increasing interest in hunting these species. Following are kill estimates by Zones:

Ruffed Grouse Kill

|                                   | <u>1960</u> | <u>1961</u> | <u>1962</u> |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Zone 1 (Upper Peninsula)          | 131,300     | 200,190     | 207,600     |
| Zone 2 (Northern Lower Peninsula) | 194,300     | 202,190     | 239,280     |
| Zone 3 (Southern Lower Peninsula) | 54,900      | 66,770      | 101,290     |

Woodcock Kill

|                                   | <u>1960</u> | <u>1961</u> | <u>1962</u> |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Zone 1 (Upper Peninsula)          | 10,620      | 14,410      | 16,450      |
| Zone 2 (Northern Lower Peninsula) | 50,790      | 48,520      | 53,300      |
| Zone 3 (Southern Lower Peninsula) | 22,480      | 39,990      | 48,830      |

In view of the great number of woodcock known to breed in the Upper Peninsula, the low kill there is particularly noteworthy and points up the considerable sporting opportunities wasted. There is evidence that many local woodcock normally move southward from the Upper Peninsula before the season opens, but some of the best hunting in the state can still be had the first week or ten days of October. It's probable that the birds from the western half of the Upper Peninsula go south through Wisconsin. Michiganders thus don't have a second crack at them as they presumably do at those in the eastern part of the peninsula.

### Cooperators' Hunting Records

Following is a final summary of hunting records by grouse cooperators for 1962 compared with 1960 and 1961:

|                                   | <u>1960</u> | <u>1961</u> | <u>1962</u> |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| No. of cooperators reporting      | 180         | 225         | 215         |
| Total hours of hunting            | 7097        | 8312        | 8209        |
| Ave. hours each cooperator hunted | 39          | 37          | 38          |
| <u>Birds bagged by species</u>    |             |             |             |
| Ruffed grouse                     | 2034        | 2626        | 2721        |
| Woodcock                          | 1029        | 1211        | 1369        |
| Sharptails                        | 77          | 95          | 38          |
| Jacksnipe                         | 58          | 16          | 46          |
| Totals                            | 3198        | 3948        | 4174        |
| Average bag per hunter            | 17.7        | 17.5        | 19.4        |

### Birds Flushed Per Gun Hour

|        | <u>Ruffed Grouse</u> |             |             | <u>Woodcock</u> |             |             |
|--------|----------------------|-------------|-------------|-----------------|-------------|-------------|
|        | <u>1960</u>          | <u>1961</u> | <u>1962</u> | <u>1960</u>     | <u>1961</u> | <u>1962</u> |
| Zone 1 | .99                  | 1.20        | 1.59        | .25             | .69         | .82         |
| Zone 2 | 2.75                 | 2.59        | 2.82        | .69             | .47         | .72         |
| Zone 3 | 2.53                 | 2.33        | 2.29        | .44             | .57         | .47         |

The map on the last page shows ruffed grouse flushing rates by county. This time it includes a few Zone 3 counties where an appreciable number of hunting hours were reported.

### Effect of Snow on Hunting Success

In view of the current interest in extending grouse seasons into the winter, it is pertinent to examine what effect the untimely snowfall late last October had on either flushing rates or shooting success. Following is a summary of cooperators' records during the days when weather records show snow on the ground at most stations, compared to the records for the entire season:

|        | <u>Grouse Flushed per gun hour</u> |                   | <u>Per cent shot of grouse flushed</u> |                   |
|--------|------------------------------------|-------------------|--|-------------------|
|        | <u>Entire Season</u>               | <u>Oct. 23-26</u> | <u>Entire Season</u>                   | <u>Oct. 23-26</u> |
| Zone 1 | 1.59                               | 1.29              | 22.7%                                  | 23.0%             |
| Zone 2 | 2.82                               | 3.28              | 12.4%                                  | 10.9%             |
| Zone 3 | 2.29                               | 2.16              | 11.2%                                  | 8.1%              |

There do not seem to be significant differences in either flushing rates or in the degree of difficulty in bagging grouse when there is snow on the ground.



Prospects for the 1963 Season

Proverbially this is the year when the ruffed grouse cycle is expected to start its downward swing. To be sure, there are signs of a decline, but it seems likely that since we did not have a high peak there will be only a moderate drop in this decade.

Spring drumming counts indicated a slight increase in the number of breeding ruffed grouse in the Upper Peninsula; in the northern Lower Peninsula there was little change from last year. Brood counts tell a slightly different story. In the Upper Peninsula as a whole the frequency of broods sighted is very similar to last year with a significant decrease only in the west end and a significant increase in the central district. In the northern Lower Peninsula brood counts are down somewhat in all districts. Summer surveys indicate that grouse on Garden Island are not as high, while on Beaver Island we can expect as good or better hunting than last year. No figures are available for the southern Lower Peninsula but grouse densities don't change much here. All told, we still predict a good hunting season with a kill of around 500,000 grouse.

Sharp-tailed grouse dancing ground counts as a whole showed little change from a year ago. More birds were noted on Drummond Island but numbers were still well below carrying capacity, so the season will be closed this fall for the third straight year to see if the population will come back up to normal. Sharp-tails do not seem to be able to take heavy hunting pressure when their numbers are below a certain minimum. There still is no noticeable comeback in the westernmost counties so they were again closed to sharptail hunting. Birds are down somewhat in the Seney area. Best hunting is predicted in western Alger and Marquette counties. In the special Lower Peninsula hunting area birds showed a slight decline this spring. The season was lengthened this fall, for pressure has been very light in this area, and we do not believe that hunting has yet had a limiting effect on populations.

Woodcock singing ground counts indicated about a 15 per cent increase in breeding birds, and indications are that they had excellent breeding success. Fall populations should, therefore, be even better than a year ago. We have been advocating an easing of regulations and this year the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service granted an increase in the bag limits to 5 birds a day and 10 in possession. They also allowed a longer season which made it possible to have ruffed grouse and woodcock seasons coincide in all zones, as they should.

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