

MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION
Game Division

Report No. 2202
September 17, 1958

THE 1957 GROUSE SEASON, WITH PROSPECTS FOR 1958

by
G. A. Ammann

General Summary

After a cyclic low centering around 1955, the state's ruffed grouse population has again begun to increase. Judging by the hunters' mail survey, the low was in 1956 when only approximately 300,000 birds were shot, compared to around 800,000 in 1952. In 1957, the kill had risen to about 350,000 birds. Cooperators' flush counts show the low as occurring in 1955. Separated by zones, the cooperators' flush counts showed a slight increase in Zone 1 (Upper Peninsula) in 1955, when Zone 2 (northern Lower Peninsula) was having its low. In Zone 3 (southern Lower Peninsula) grouse populations have shown little change (see Figure 2).

Surprisingly, sharptails have not shown much change in the Upper Peninsula. In most localities where good populations prevailed in the early 'fifties, their numbers showed little indication of a cyclic decline. An increase was noted in 1957. Unaccountably, the woodcock kill showed a considerable increase in 1957; in Zone 2, more than twice as many were shot as in 1956.

This fall, we can expect at least as many ruffed grouse as last year, and possibly more, in the northern two-thirds of the state, with little change in Zone 3. Sharptails will probably show little change as a whole in the Upper Peninsula, although they will probably still be relatively low on Drummond Island. Woodcock, we believe, will be as abundant as ever, although the number that will be shot depends more on weather and migration patterns than on actual populations. Although no population censuses are made for jacksnipe, we have no reason to expect much difference in their numbers this fall.

The 1957 Season

Detailed records obtained from 79 cooperators totaling 2,885 hours of hunting in 1957 showed a general increase from 1.47 ruffed grouse flushed per gun hour in 1956 to 1.85 in 1957, for the state as a whole. Zone 1 showed more of an increase than Zone 2, while in Zone 3 there was no appreciable change:

	<u>1956</u>	<u>1957</u>
Zone 1 (Upper Peninsula)	1.03	1.58
Zone 2 (northern Lower Peninsula)	1.72	1.93
Zone 3 (southern Lower Peninsula)	1.75	1.72

Figure 1 shows the results broken down by county, in the northern two zones. A word of caution is necessary, however. Only a few hours of hunting records are available for some of the counties, which makes these figures less reliable. In order to point out the more reliable data, we have indicated in Figure 1 those counties for which 50 or more hours of hunting are available. Comparing the individual counties with the figures for 1956 (see last year's report), there were increases in most counties, especially in the western half of the Upper Peninsula. In Zone 2, Benzie, Grand Traverse, Manistee, and some of the counties which formerly had the heaviest deer populations (Montmorency, Crawford, Oscoda, Alcona, Missaukee, and Roscommon) have shown the most improvement in grouse populations. Note that the Beaver and Bois Blanc Island grouse have held up well, but on Drummond Island they seem to have dropped to about the same level as the average in the rest of the Upper Peninsula.

In Zone 3, there are only 145 hours of hunting records altogether, so we have not shown the figures by county.

Sharp-tailed grouse hunting success by cooperators jumped up from 2.42 birds flushed per hour in 1956 to 4.17 in 1957, indicating a large increase, although the relatively few total number of hours (394 in 1957) of hunting records make these figures less reliable than those for ruffed grouse. These records were from hunts mostly in Chippewa, Luce, Schoolcraft and Marquette counties, and on Drummond Island. Of special interest are the reports of large flocks of sharptails in the Ewen-Matchwood-Topaz area of south central Ontonagon County, much as it was in the late 'thirties. On the Bullock Ranch area, west of Seney, sharptail hunting was about as good as it was in 1956. On Drummond Island (after a closed season in 1956) the birds were again about as numerous as they were in 1955.

It was an excellent woodcock year with birds noted in the Upper Peninsula through most of October. District Game Supervisors reported noticeably more birds than in 1956. Some observers believed there were two migration waves in Zone 2, one the first few days of October, and another around the 20th as usual. Grouse cooperators flushed .55 woodcock per hour in 1957 compared to .50 per hour in 1956.*

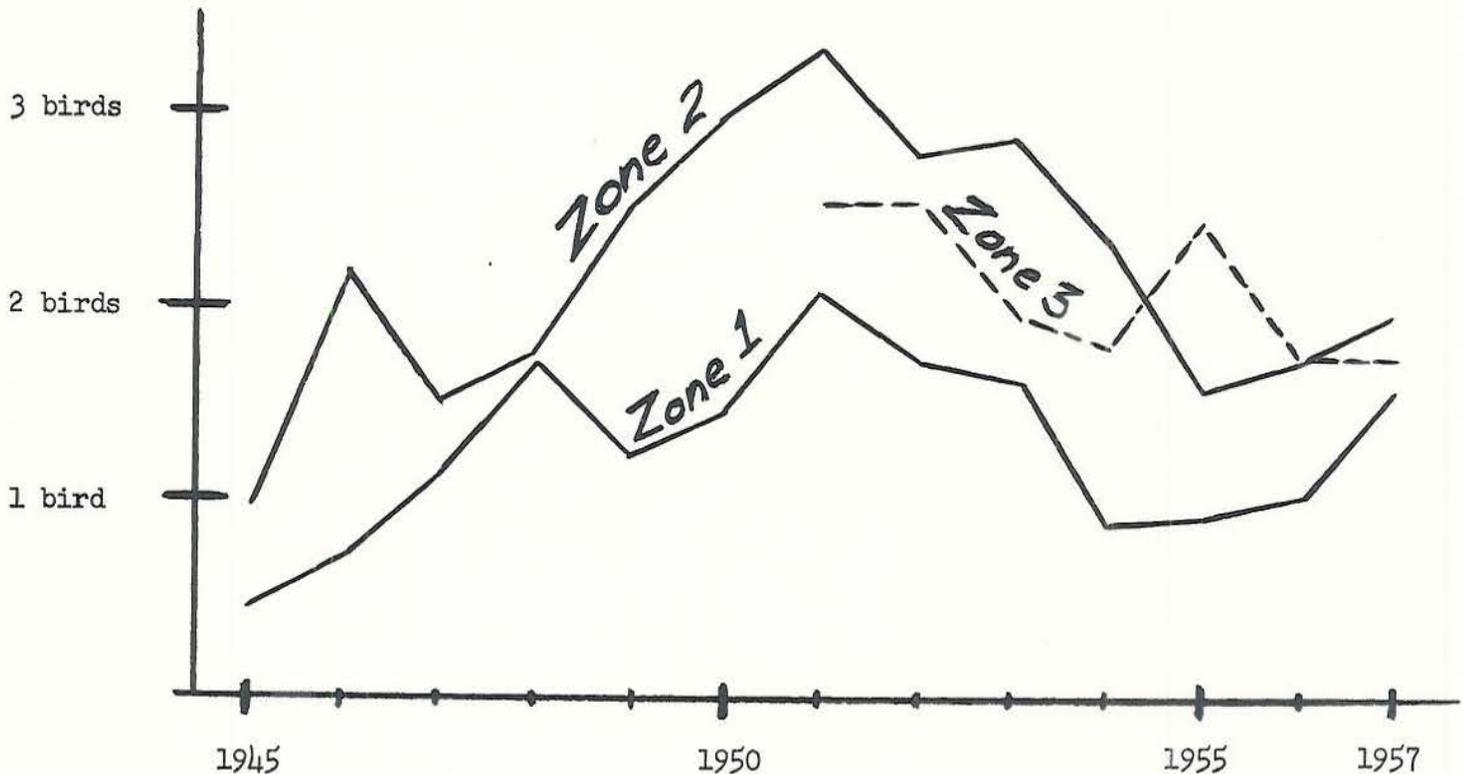
Summary of Hunting Success Records

Figure 2 illustrates graphically the average number of ruffed grouse flushed per gun hour by cooperators in each of the past 13 years in Zones 1 and 2, and for the past 7 years in Zone 3. The line for Zone 3 is broken to indicate that the figures are not as reliable for this area as they are for the northern two zones.

* Time spent hunting woodcock is not separated from ruffed grouse hunting, hence the seemingly low number of woodcock flushed per hour.

Fig. 2

Ruffed Grouse Flushed Per Gun Hour by Cooperators
(1945 - 1957)



We have summarized these hunters' flushing records by counties in the northern two zones for the past 10 years. Here again it should be noted that although there are over 1,000 hours of records for some of the counties, we have very few hours for others. For instance, they vary from 1,895 hours in Newaygo County to only 20 hours in Bay County. And, what is also quite important, the averages are often biased because of unequal distribution of hunting records in the low and high population years.

Following are the counties for which we have 500 or more hours of records (and therefore the most reliable figures), and the average number of grouse flushed per hour for the past 10 years:

<u>Zone 1</u>		<u>Zone 2</u>	
Iron	1.91	Newaygo	3.18
Mackinac	1.84	Charlevoix	2.80
Chippewa	1.75	Mecosta	2.62
Ontonagon	1.62	Lake	2.56
Schoolcraft	1.36	Cheboygan	2.48
Houghton	1.35	Wexford	2.47
Baraga	1.19	Missaukee	2.36
Luce	1.10	Presque Isle	2.35
Alger	1.01	Mason	2.11
Marquette	1.01	Gladwin	2.03
		Kalkaska	1.92
		Otsego	1.84
		Roscommon	1.58