

STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
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Review of the 1981 Grouse and Woodcock Season with Prospects for 1982

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The 1981 Season in Review

STATEWIDE

While no records were broken in 1981, the overall season was reasonably good for most hunters. Compared to 1980, the grouse harvest was down 4 percent with a take of 723,620 birds in 1981 versus 756,660 in 1980. The 1981 harvest of 251,440 woodcock represents a 16 percent drop from the 1980 figure of 299,590.

Ruffed grouse hunter numbers in 1981 decreased 2 percent, and the average bag per hunter was down only slightly. During 1981, an estimated 1,741,470 hunter days were spent in pursuit of "old ruff." The ruffed grouse continues to be the number one game bird in the state. In relation to hunting effort for all small game species in Michigan, only the cottontail rabbit was the target for more days of hunting recreation.

Maps showing woodcock and ruffed grouse flush rates by county are attached. Tables 1, 2, 3, and 4, present kill figures, hunter numbers, hunter days, and cooperators' flush rates for ruffed grouse and woodcock.

REGIONALLY

Region I (Upper Peninsula) - Expectations based on pre-season observations of a better than average season did not materialize. Ruffed grouse flush rates dropped from 2.21 birds per hour to 1.81 in 1981. Grouse flush rates were down from 1980 in most portions, but about the same in the eastern U.P. Woodcock flush rates went from 1.52 in 1980 to 1.23 in 1981.

With 16 percent fewer ruffed grouse harvested than in 1980, the U.P. was the only zone with a decline in total harvest. However, 14 percent more woodcock were taken here in 1981, as compared to a 16 percent decrease in the harvest of "timberdoodles." statewide.

Region II (Northern Lower Peninsula) - Hunters flushed 2.46 grouse per hour in 1981, up from 2.21 the previous year. Flush rates were improved over 1980 in most counties and decreased only in a few. While the grouse take jumped 3 percent, the harvest of woodcock was 19 percent lower than in 1980. The woodcock flush rate dropped to 1.57 from 1.82 in 1980. In terms of hunter days and total harvests of ruffed grouse and woodcock, Region II is still far ahead of the other two regions.

Region III (Southern Lower Peninsula) - Down slightly from 1980's grouse flush rate of 2.56, southern Michigan hunters put up 2.33 birds per hour. However, the woodcock flush rate was up considerably from 0.72 birds per hour in 1980 to 0.93. The grouse harvest increased only slightly (1%) over 1980, while the woodcock harvest was down 27 percent. This was the second year an additional 36 days of hunting opportunity were afforded with a September 15 opener. As compared to the 1980 season, flush rates were the same to slightly lower in most of the better grouse hunting counties.

GENERAL

For the first time, in 1981, we asked hunter-cooperators to indicate their observations on three items -- 1) Overall Season Impression; 2) Grouse Food Abundance; and 3) Woodcock Abundance by Weekly Period. Most hunters cooperated and the combined results of their responses proved to be interesting and informative.

1) Season Impressions

Cooperating hunters were asked to rate the overall grouse and woodcock season. The request was to categorize impressions of the season on its own merits, i.e. not necessarily with the previous year. A summary of impressions is presented below by Region.

	<u>Hunter-Cooperator Impressions</u>		
	<u>Good</u>	<u>Fair</u>	<u>Poor</u>
Region I	35%	38%	27%
Region II	42%	39%	19%
Region III	30%	43%	27%
STATEWIDE	37%	40%	23%

2) Grouse Food Abundance

Survey participants were asked to record their observations on the abundance/scarcity of various grouse foods. Although there were some geographic variations, the overall ratings were as follows:

<u>Good</u>	<u>Somewhat Above Average</u>	<u>Average</u>	<u>Somewhat Below Average</u>	<u>Poor</u>
Apple	Thornapple	Wild Grape		Acorns
Wild Cherries	Dogwood			
	Wintergreen			
	Blackberries			

3) Woodcock Abundance

Cooperators were asked to record their observations on woodcock abundance by weekly periods in the counties they hunted. The compilation of their responses below reveals varying peak periods between Regions.

Percent of Respondents Indicating High Woodcock Abundance By Period

	September		October				November	
	<u>15-22</u>	<u>23-30</u>	<u>1-7</u>	<u>8-15</u>	<u>16-23</u>	<u>24-31</u>	<u>1-7</u>	<u>8-15</u>
Region I	23	23	23	23	4	4	-	-
Region II	31	18	20	17	8	5	2	-
Region III	8	5	16	8	19	32	11	-

Prospects for 1982

Hatching weather was favorable throughout most of the state. Fruit crops are looking exceptionally good this year. Perhaps the bleakest outlook on grouse abundance is in the U.P., where biologists predict somewhat lower numbers than last year. A contrasting bright spot in the U.P. appears to be in Marquette, Alger, and Delta counties, where biologists are a little more optimistic about improvements from last year. Prospects for the northern Lower Peninsula appear to be about the same as 1980 or slightly lower. Hunters in the southern Lower Peninsula should find roughly the same numbers of birds as last year except in the southwestern portion, where grouse observations have been lower.

Since many state-owned lands in the southern Lower Peninsula are heavily hunted, many of you may want to consider taking advantage of the over 180,000 acres of land leased for hunting through the Hunter Access Program. Lists of participating landowners are available from hunting license dealers.

TABLE 1

Estimates from Postcard Poll

A. KILL

<u>Ruffed Grouse</u>	<u>1976</u>	<u>1977</u>	<u>1978</u>	<u>1979</u>	<u>1980</u>	<u>1981</u>
Region I	232,300	270,000	210,190	226,740	279,480	235,990
Region II	385,800	377,000	372,700	353,610	328,330	336,710
Region III	<u>110,400</u>	<u>118,000</u>	<u>121,250</u>	<u>143,560</u>	<u>148,850</u>	<u>150,920</u>
TOTAL	728,500	765,000	704,140	723,910	756,660	723,620

Woodcock

Region I	84,600	47,000	67,580	42,570	51,440	58,820
Region II	216,200	214,000	175,240	193,120	156,730	126,320
Region III	<u>89,000</u>	<u>89,000</u>	<u>66,260</u>	<u>86,140</u>	<u>91,420</u>	<u>66,300</u>
TOTAL	389,800	350,000	309,080	321,830	299,590	251,440

B. NUMBER OF HUNTERS

<u>Ruffed Grouse</u>	<u>1976</u>	<u>1977</u>	<u>1978</u>	<u>1979</u>	<u>1980</u>	<u>1981</u>
Region I	49,200	50,000	46,270	44,000	45,120	44,760
Region II	130,700	129,000	117,370	121,600	105,490	102,890
Region III	<u>54,900</u>	<u>55,000</u>	<u>60,240</u>	<u>65,600</u>	<u>70,030</u>	<u>67,750</u>
TOTAL	234,800	234,000	223,880	231,200	220,640	215,400

Woodcock

Region I	19,700	18,000	16,800	14,200	14,990	13,750
Region II	58,400	59,000	50,320	52,200	43,870	38,370
Region III	<u>48,000</u>	<u>43,000</u>	<u>35,460</u>	<u>37,700</u>	<u>40,900</u>	<u>30,660</u>
TOTAL	126,100	120,000	102,580	104,100	99,760	82,780

C. HUNTER DAYS

<u>Ruffed Grouse</u>	<u>1976</u>	<u>1977</u>	<u>1978</u>	<u>1979</u>	<u>1980</u>	<u>1981</u>
Region I	539,030	526,590	494,070	452,290	475,550	485,920
Region II	883,890	902,760	899,730	881,500	754,909	758,050
Region III	<u>364,980</u>	<u>373,840</u>	<u>385,660</u>	<u>435,920</u>	<u>494,070</u>	<u>497,500</u>
TOTAL	1,787,900	1,803,190	1,779,460	1,769,710	1,723,710	1,741,470

Woodcock

Region I	196,180	166,570	168,190	121,700	131,680	134,100
Region II	422,640	414,680	379,940	405,070	319,710	296,420
Region III	<u>288,760</u>	<u>260,510</u>	<u>200,830</u>	<u>222,100</u>	<u>268,770</u>	<u>203,730</u>
TOTAL	907,580	841,760	748,960	748,870	720,160	634,250

TABLE 2

Cooperators' Hunting Records - 1974-1980

	<u>1975</u>	<u>1976</u>	<u>1977</u>	<u>1978</u>	<u>1979</u>	<u>1980</u>	<u>1981</u>
Number of cooperators reporting	158	127	13	239	216	236	219
Total hunting hours	5,208	5,120	4,039	8,680	9,052	10,497	10,275
Average hours each cooperator hunted	33	40	31	36	42	44	47
RUFFED GROUSE FLUSHED PER GUN HOUR							
Region I (Upper Peninsula)	1.19	1.27	1.76	1.32	1.84	2.21	1.81
Region II (Northern L. P.)	2.05	1.78	2.20	2.00	2.03	2.21	2.46
Region III (Southern L. P.)	2.09	2.40	2.61	2.40	2.68	2.56	2.33
WOODCOCK FLUSHED PER GUN HOUR (September 15 - November)							
Region I (Upper Peninsula)	2.48	1.88	1.73	1.65	1.19	1.52	1.23
Region II (Northern L. P.)	1.64	1.92	1.85	1.45	1.45	1.82	1.72
Region III (Southern L. P.)	.93	.55	.72	.64	.52	.72	.93

TABLE 3

Ruffed Grouse Flushed Per Gun Hour by Cooperators - by Half-Month Periods

	Region I					Region II				
	<u>1977</u>	<u>1978</u>	<u>1979</u>	<u>1980</u>	<u>1981</u>	<u>1977</u>	<u>1978</u>	<u>1979</u>	<u>1980</u>	<u>1981</u>
Sept. 15-30	1.41	1.08	1.73	2.20	1.35	2.16	2.00	1.96	2.29	2.52
Oct. 1-15	1.45	1.05	1.53	1.79	1.71	2.28	2.05	2.17	2.25	2.51
Oct. 16-31	1.82	1.64	2.15	2.36	2.17	1.93	2.04	2.05	2.04	2.48
Nov. 1-14	1.50	1.23	2.58	2.86	2.48	2.66	2.39	2.03	2.18	2.38
Dec. 1-15	*	*	*	*	*	2.27	2.05	1.72	2.10	2.35
Dec. 16-Jan. 1	*	*	*	*	*	1.73	1.32	2.09	2.39	1.92
	SEASON AVERAGE				1.81	SEASON AVERAGE				2.46
Region III										
				<u>1977</u>	<u>1978</u>	<u>1979</u>	<u>1980</u>	<u>1981</u>		
September 15-30				*	*	*	2.56	2.28		
October 1-15				*	*	*	2.36	2.44		
October 16-31				2.56	2.11	2.64	2.63	2.44		
November 1-14				2.80	2.85	2.83	2.50	2.47		
December 1-15				2.90	2.37	2.67	2.61	1.68		
December 16-January 1				2.59	2.21	2.57	2.66	1.90		
				SEASON AVERAGE				2.33		

*Season closed

TABLE 4

Woodcock Flushed Per Gun Hour by Cooperators - by Half-Month Periods

	<u>Region I</u>				
	<u>1977</u>	<u>1978</u>	<u>1979</u>	<u>1980</u>	<u>1981</u>
September 15-30	2.05	1.99	1.18	1.74	1.53
October 1-15	.92	2.20	1.27	1.98	1.61
October 16-31	.90	.66	1.80	1.43	1.01
November 1-14	.18	.15	.26	.05	.09
	SEASON AVERAGE				1.23

	<u>Region II</u>				
	<u>1977</u>	<u>1978</u>	<u>1979</u>	<u>1980</u>	<u>1981</u>
September 15-30	2.12	2.07	1.79	2.02	2.24
October 1-15	2.00	1.74	2.02	2.49	2.04
October 16-31	1.13	1.17	1.42	1.96	1.42
November 1-14	.19	.44	.45	.42	.26
	SEASON AVERAGE				1.72

	<u>Region III</u>				
	<u>1977</u>	<u>1978</u>	<u>1979</u>	<u>1980</u>	<u>1981</u>
September 15-30	*	*	*	1.74	1.09
October 1-15	*	*	*	1.66	1.10
October 16-31	1.35	1.02	1.24	1.01	1.31
November 1-14	.25	.50	.46	.69	.31
	SEASON AVERAGE				.93

*Season Closed

