



Michigan Department of Natural Resources
Wildlife Division

2018 RUFFED GROUSE AND AMERICAN WOODCOCK COOPERATORS EARLY SEASON REPORT

Early season reports from ruffed grouse and American woodcock cooperators allow biologists to quickly assess hunter success and local field conditions across the state of Michigan at the beginning of the grouse season. This report is a summary of their responses for September 15-18, 2018.

Cooperators returned 43 useable surveys. They hunted approximately 184 hours in 31 counties during the survey period (Table 1). Respondents hunted most in Zone 2, followed by Zone 1, and Zone 3. Hunters reported the highest flush rates for grouse in Zone 2 (Table 1). Individual counties having at least 10 hours of hunting with the highest flush rates for grouse were Benzie, Lake and Wexford. Although the woodcock season was not open during the survey period, cooperators were asked to also count woodcock flushes. Individual counties having at least 10 hours of hunting with the highest flush rates for woodcock were Benzie and Wexford.

About 14% of the respondents thought grouse populations were up or slightly up from last year in the areas they hunted, with 40% reporting populations about the same as the previous year and 47% describing them as down or slightly down (Table 2). About 25% of the respondents thought woodcock populations were up or slightly up from last year, while about 43% thought they were the same as last year and 33% thought they were down or slightly down (Table 2).

Ruffed grouse have approximately ten-year cycles in abundance over much of Canada, Alaska, and the Great Lakes states of Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Michigan (Rusch et al. 1999). Over the years, many theories have been proposed to explain these cycles including diseases, weather, forest fires, sunspots, starvation, crowding, predators, genetic changes, and chance (Rusch 1989). It appears that we are fluctuating within the decline following the peak in the grouse population cycle (Figure 1). However, hunters should note that increased or decreased abundance of animals at a regional scale does not ensure the same trend locally. The best grouse and woodcock hunting opportunities will continue to be in areas of young early forest successional habitat.

Many hunters commented on wet morning conditions and hot afternoon temperatures for the opening of the grouse season while just a few commented on great weather conditions. Hunters also commented that there was dense cover, heavy foliage and the fruits were plentiful throughout the state. There were mixed comments on hunter's success and bird numbers in areas in which they hunted. We wish all hunters an enjoyable and successful time afield pursuing grouse and woodcock.

Acknowledgments

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Literature Cited

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Table 1. Ruffed grouse and American woodcock flush rates reported by zone and year for September 15-18, 2018.

Zone	Hours	Grouse/hr	Woodcock/hr
1	24.5	0.4	0.8
2	142.3	1.9	1.3
3	17.0	0.5	0.5
Unk	0.0	0.0	0.0
State	183.8	1.5	1.2

Table 2. Hunter opinions about Ruffed grouse and American woodcock populations.

Trend	Ruffed Grouse	Woodcock
	2018	2018
Up	2%	14%
Slightly Up	12%	11%
Same	40%	43%
Slightly Down	19%	11%
Down	28%	22%

Figure 1. Ruffed grouse flush rates as reported by cooperating hunters, 1957-2018. This figure shows a summary of the data collected during the entire grouse hunting season.

