



## 2011 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, 2011.

Cooperators returned 100 useable surveys. They hunted 661 hours in 49 counties during the survey period. Respondents hunted most in Zone 2, followed by Zone 1, and Zone 3. Hunters reported the highest average flush rates for grouse in Zones 2 and 1, respectively (Table 1). Individual counties having at least 10 hours of hunting with the highest flush rates for grouse were Otsego, Cheboygan, Missaukee, Clare, and Crawford counties. 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 Houghton, Lake, Mason, Wexford, Gladwin, and Arenac counties.

About 28% of the respondents thought grouse populations were up or slightly up from last year in the areas they hunted, with 23% reporting populations about the same as the previous year and 49% describing them as down or slightly down (Table 2). About 17% of the respondents thought woodcock populations were up or slightly up from last year, while about 14% thought they were the same as last year and 69% 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 near 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 the dry conditions for the opening of the grouse season. Hunters also commented that there was a lot of soft mast crops. Distribution of birds appeared to be spotty, with some hunters reporting a very successful opener to the grouse season, while other hunters were not finding birds. We wish all hunters an enjoyable and successful time afield pursuing grouse and woodcock.

**Acknowledgments:** We thank all of the hunter cooperators who provided their early season hunting data. Survey data was entered by Theresa Riebow. This report was compiled by Valerie Frawley and Al Stewart, and it was reviewed by Russ Mason, Doug Reeves, Adam Bump, and Cheryl Nelson. This project was supported by the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act under Pittman-Robertson Project W-147-R-5.

### Literature Cited

- Rusch, D.H. 1989. The grouse cycle. Pages 210-226 *in* S. Atwater and J. Schnell editors. Ruffed Grouse. Stackpole Books. Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, USA.
- Rusch, D.H., J.R. Cary, and L.B. Keith. 1999. Pattern and process in ruffed grouse cycles. *Midwest Fish and Wildlife Conference* 61:238.

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

Zone	2010			2011		
	Hours	Grouse / hour	Woodcock / hour	Hours	Grouse / hour	Woodcock / hour
1	168	1.7	0.4	156	1.6	0.7
2	499	1.9	1.5	443	2.3	1.1
3	66	0.8	1.1	45	0.4	0.5
State	733	1.8	1.2	644	2.0	0.9

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

Trend	Ruffed grouse		Woodcock	
	2010	2011	2010	2011
Up	15%	3%	20%	4%
Slightly Up	18%	25%	16%	14%
Same	30%	23%	32%	14%
Slightly Down	14%	34%	13%	41%
Down	23%	15%	20%	28%

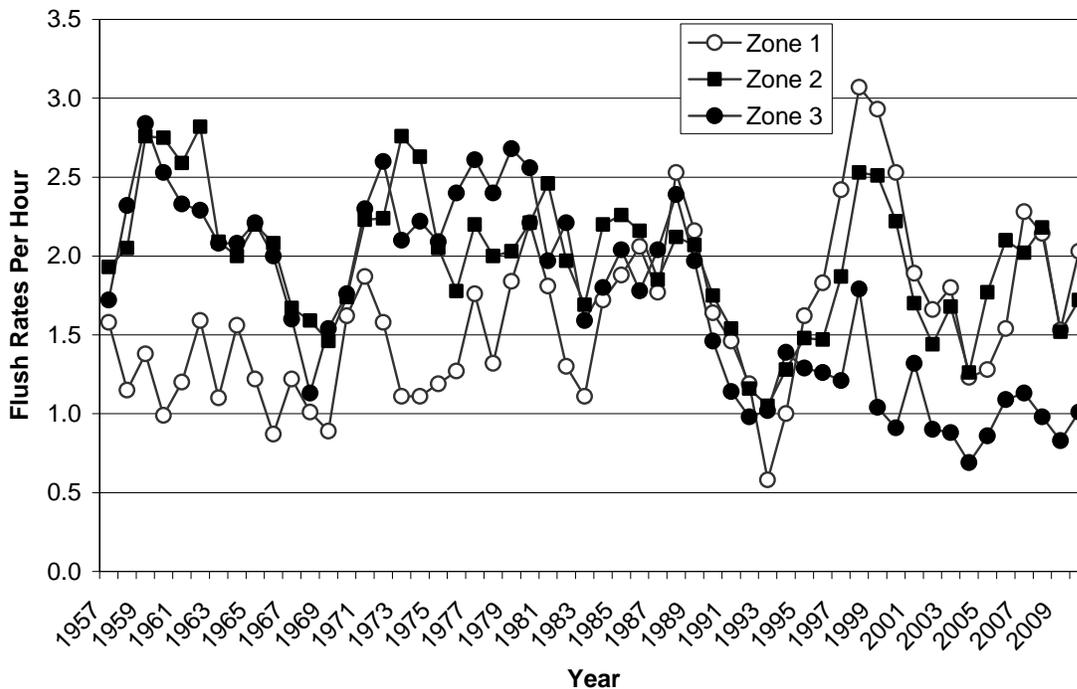


Figure 1. Ruffed grouse flush rates as reported by cooperating hunters, 1957-2010. This figure shows a summary of the data collected during the entire grouse hunting season. Data for 2011 will be added after the end of the season.