

Evaluation of Sex and Age Identification Characteristics in Sharp-tailed Grouse (Poster)

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Sharp-tailed Grouse are a popular upland game bird for sportsman and a species with a long history of population reintroductions and augmentations. Center rectrices have been used as a dominant sex identifier for Sharp-tailed Grouse with an accuracy rate of 85% to 93%. When managing small populations or reintroduction efforts for a species, error rates as small as 7% could still have significant consequences when calculating population parameters. Often sex and age characteristics are reevaluated for a species, or experts are tested on this knowledge for accuracy. Our objectives are (1) to evaluate the specific measurements or characteristics present to determine sex and age in Sharp-tailed Grouse and (2) to develop a more detailed key to aid in effective management and monitoring of Sharp-tailed Grouse populations. To evaluate these characteristics, we will test wildlife professionals at the Montana Chapter Annual Conference on sex and age of Sharp-tailed Grouse using harvested feathers and wings. Identification data from professionals will be compared against genetic results of the grouse samples. Following the comparative analysis, feather characteristics will be evaluated and an identification key will be developed and tested on a group of non-experts. Creating thorough tools towards proper sex criteria will strengthen adaptive management for Sharp-tailed Grouse in the future.