

Upland Report 2020 by Jason Curtis

The 2020 Upland hunting season was one of the better ones in recent memory. Bird numbers for both Grouse and resident Woodcock in New Brunswick were excellent. Spring weather conditions were ideal in May and June with very little rain and warm temps making for good chick survival and pleasant days in the field.

Early season woodcock hunting (September 15th-30th) is always challenging with full foliage and warm temps, but it is a great time to get out and get the dogs on birds. With this year's abundant resident woodcock numbers it meant for lots of action and excitement. Grouse hunting opened on October 1st with great expectations for Miramichi hunters – and it didn't disappoint. With an earlier than normal leaf drop, the shooting in October really opened up for us, but as grouse hunters know - leaves or not - they are extremely tough to get a bead on. The Miramichi river valley is lucky to have such a wide variety of excellent, and generally productive, upland coverts ranging from the traditional old abandoned farmstead coverts to interval type coverts as well as clear-cuts that have regenerating in aspen – all of which had amazing hunting this year.

The woodcock migration changes a little every year based on weather conditions. This year was absolutely ideal, temperatures got progressively cooler as October went along but without an early snowfall or abnormally cold and early freeze up the birds migrated very slowly through New Brunswick. The third week of October is almost always the height of the migration and this year was no different. With temperatures staying warm we saw good woodcock numbers well into November - if you didn't mind travelling around searching the flight bird coverts. For those who don't know, flight bird coverts are coverts that usually do not have local resident birds living in them during the year. They are places that migrating woodcock seek out and stop, rest, and feed as they make their way south. I could write a book on that topic alone...lol

Late season Grouse hunting through November stayed pretty consistent. The only drawback this year was a lack of fruit on apple and hawthorn trees in the central part of the Province. The yield was very small due to the hot summer and most of the wild apple trees were barren. Many of the orchard coverts that usually hold grouse didn't have good numbers despite the high population everywhere else. We had our best grouse hunting this year in the aspen clear-cut coverts.

All in all, 2020 was a great season in the uplands of New Brunswick but a very strange one for guides and hunters alike. With the COVID situation shutting down the US border and a lot of local hunters not wanting to get together to hunt, it made for very quiet and solitary fall hunting. Most coverts saw very little pressure which made the Grouse a little less wary than normal - local hunter took full advantage of that!