

Ruffed Grouse in Georgia

M. T. Mengak

Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources

- Found in only a few counties in N. Georgia
 - Usually > 1000 feet elevation
 - Adult weight about 1.1 pounds; male tail feather length usually > 14.9 cm; female usually less than 14 cm
- Nest in early April to mid-June
 - 9-10 eggs per clutch; 24-26 day incubation; generally do not re-nest
 - Brood habitat is dense hardwood saplings; 25% nest success; 25% chick survival
 - Chicks are precocial; hatch about the size of a man's thumb; fully grown in about 17 weeks
- Feed primarily on plants; up to 93% by volume in fall and winter diets
 - Browsers – feed on leaves, buds, and twigs
 - Winter Diet – Mountain Laurel; Christmas fern; Greenbrier
 - Overall Diet (Top 5) – Mountain Laurel (21.5%); Greenbrier (12.5%); White Oak (10.6%); Christmas Fern (10.4%); Foam Flower (8.4%)
 - Low nutritional status compared to north birds; poor in protein
- Male home range approx. 50 acres; female home range approx. 100 ac.
 - Mid-1980's – 1.5 flushes per hour was good; late 1990's – 0.75 flushes per hour was more typical
 - Breeding Bird Survey shows steady decline throughout the S. Appalachian Mtns. over the past 35 years
- Hardwood saplings are very important habitat
 - 7-15 year old clearcuts; 8000 to 10000 stems per acre > 6 feet tall
 - Cuts of 5-20 ac; 5-15 years old; more than 14% of total area
 - Thin to residual basal area of 20 sq. ft. per acre
 - Herbaceous openings near or next to a dense hardwood stand aged 5-15 years would be excellent habitat
 - Preserve briars (Blackberry), greenbriers, honeysuckle, grapevines; Kudzu is bad.
 - They need early successional habitat; early 1980's 7% of Georgia National Forests; now about 3% of Georgia National Forests
 - Seed old roadbeds with clover; salvage oak saplings; create edge zones with briars and shrubs to produce soft mast

