

Greater Sage-Grouse *Centrocercus urophasianus*

Very local, uncommon resident in good-quality shrub-steppe habitats of c. Washington.



● Year-round

Subspecies: Western Sage-Grouse, *C. u. phaios*.

Habitat: Shrub-steppe and meadow steppe habitat dominated by sagebrush and bluebunch wheatgrass. Fairly common along edges of wheat fields associated with native shrub/grass habitat. Also croplands planted in grass as part of agricultural set-aside programs such as the Conservation Reserve Program.

Occurrence: One of the most habitat-specific birds in Washington and illustrative of the effects of human-caused habitat changes on natural ecosystems. Jewett et al. (1953) noted extirpation from parts of original range and decrease in numbers from descriptions in the mid-1800s and early 1900s, and Smith et al. (1997) and Stepniowski (1999) described similar changes to the present. Historically distributed in sagebrush-dominated habitats of w. N. America including portions of Montana s. to Colorado and California and w. to Oregon and Washington (see Schroeder et al. 2004). Current range in Washington essentially limited to shrub-steppe/wheat areas of one area in Douglas and Beezley Hills area of Grant Co., and on the Yakima Training Center in Kittitas and Yakima Cos. (MAS). Peripherally, birds are occasionally observed in areas adjacent to known populations, including Bridgeport SP, Dyre Hill, Badger Mt., and e. side of Banks L. (MAS). Additionally, recent observations in areas with extirpated populations include the Methow and Scotch Cr. WMAs and Colville Indian Agency area in Okanogan Co., Rattlesnake Hills, Quilomene WMA and Umtanum Ridge, Saddle Mts., and Swanson Lks. WMA, Lincoln Co. (MAS).

Gregarious males form flocks associated with specific leks (communal display sites) and defend

territories on leks: ≥ 100 males may appear on a single lek. Females visit leks in small flocks. During winter, flocks of 4-50 birds are common, occasionally as many as 200 birds. Strutting activity is most intense during early-morning hours and period of peak female lek attendance. Males display fidelity to lek sites that are used repeatedly from year to year. Sagebrush is eaten throughout the year, and in winter it comprises 100% of the diet. Flowers, leaves, and invertebrates are also consumed during summer. Birds may migrate between winter and summer ranges in late Apr-early May, and return to winter areas in late Aug-early Oct, and to breeding areas in mid-Feb and early Mar. Movements are as far as 75 km.

Populations have declined dramatically due to conversion of native habitat to cropland and degradation of remaining uncultivated habitats by overgrazing and shrub removal (Schroeder et al. 1999, 2004; see Knick et al. 2003). Smith et al. (1997) estimated that just 10-30% of historic Washington range is now occupied. Estimated 1998 breeding population in Washington is about 1000 birds, a decline of nearly 80% since the 1960s.

Remarks: Classed ST, FC, PHS. A Washington State Sage Grouse management plan was developed in 1995 (WDFW 1995a). A statewide harvest closure was implemented in 1988.

Noteworthy Records: 1-2 birds reported in 1968 nr. Clarkston (Weber and Larrison 1977).

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