



## Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

### Ruffed Grouse *Bonasa umbellus*

State Status: **None**  
Federal Status: **None**

**SPECIES DESCRIPTION:** The Ruffed Grouse is a medium-sized grouse, weighing 450 to 750 g. Males are slightly heavier than females. Coloration is cryptic with upperparts that are most commonly mottled rusty-brown with buff and black barring. Red or gray color phases can also occur. Underparts are barred with dark brown and buff fading toward the belly. A narrow buff-colored band runs from the lores to just behind the eye. The head has a long crest of blotchy brownish gray feathers that can be erected and on each side of the neck is a tuft of long black or brownish feathers that can be erected into an umbrella-like ruff. The rounded tail is reddish-brown or gray and has broad pale bands separated by narrow black bands and barring and a prominent dark subterminal band. Females generally have an incomplete subterminal band. The rump feathers of males have two whitish dots. In general, females are similar to males, but have a shorter crest and one whitish dot on the tail and rump feathers.

**DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE:** Ruffed Grouse are fairly common in wooded areas throughout Massachusetts, but scarcer on Cape Cod and absent from Nantucket and Suffolk Counties. They were introduced to Martha's Vineyard, Dukes County, in the 1960s but their current status there is uncertain. Populations were likely highest between the late 1800s and the mid-1940s when the Massachusetts landscape provided a mix of fields and early-successional forest. As the forests of Massachusetts matured, grouse numbers declined. Grouse numbers fluctuate from year to year and appear to be cyclical in abundance.

**HABITAT DESCRIPTION:** Ruffed Grouse occupy a variety of different habitats in Massachusetts. They prefer early-successional mixed deciduous-coniferous forest, but inhabit mature deciduous mixed forest in the western part of the state and scrub oak forest on Cape Cod. Drumming logs are important for male breeding displays. Early-successional hardwood forest with high stem densities and good visibility at ground level is important for male drumming sites.



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**THREATS:** Ruffed Grouse in Massachusetts and throughout the Northeast have been declining due to loss of suitable habitat to forest succession and development. Large-scale regional management is required to provide a mix of early-seral and mid-seral forests throughout Massachusetts. Weather conditions and food resources affect survival and recruitment. Predation is a major cause of mortality and may affect grouse population numbers.

Updated 2015

*A Species of Greatest Conservation Need in the Massachusetts State Wildlife Action Plan*

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