Central Wisconsin Prairie Chicken Census 2003

By James R. Keir

Abstract

There was an 8% rangewide increase in male prairie chickens on booming grounds in spring of 2003 compared to the previous year. This increase follows an 11% decline one year ago. A total of 564 male prairie chickens were observed in April, 2003 compared with 522 for the same areas in 2002. This annual count, and the year-to-year trend, of male prairie chickens on booming grounds are assumed to mirror the overall population level.

However, it is important to note that this increase occurred within the heart of the range (on Buena Vista and Paul J. Olson) **only** and "fringe" populations continue to fare poorly. Much of the range in central Wisconsin has lost booming grounds in recent years or the numbers of males have dramatically declined. **This continued decline has become critical to the welfare of the entire prairie chicken population in Wisconsin!**

Methods

A survey of all current prairie chicken range is completed annually. Surveyors from U.W. Stevens Point (UWSP), Wisconsin DNR and private volunteers locate all booming (display) grounds in late March and early April. An effort is made to obtain three counts from each ground in mid-April to establish the number of males defending territories. Counts are taken on and in the vicinity of the following grassland management properties: Leola, Buena Vista, Paul J. Olson, Mead and McMillan. Counts are also obtained from the “Outlying Area”, an area beginning north of McMillan and extending northward to Medford (portions of eastern Clark, western Marathon and southeastern Taylor counties).

Prairie chickens are also typically present at Dewey Marsh, north of Stevens Point, and at the Searles Marsh, west of Wisconsin Rapids. Because these few birds are isolated and typically surveyed only for presence or absence, they are not included in the annual summary totals. Prairie chickens were present at Dewey Marsh (only intermittently) and absent from the Searles Marsh in 2003.

Results

The survey objective is to count every individual male prairie chicken defending a territory on every booming ground in the state. Fluctuations in numbers from year to year do not always follow the same pattern from one part of the range to another. In addition to annual production, factors influencing spring population levels include, but are not limited to, weather, habitat quality, and changes in private land use. A total of 564 male prairie chickens were observed in April, 2003 compared with 522 the previous year. This annual count, and the year-to-year trend, of male prairie chickens on booming grounds are assumed to mirror the overall population level.

Acknowledgments

The following individuals participated in the 2003 surveys of greater prairie chickens in central Wisconsin: Buena Vista — Lyle Nauman (Coordinator), Walter Rasmussen, Richard Soderberg, Joe Schaufenbuel, Dennis Haessly and the Student Chapter of The Wildlife Society, UWSP;

Paul Olson — Lyle Nauman (Coordinator) and Dan O'Connell;

Leola — James Keir (Coordinator), Ken Rosenthal, Gary Wolf, Greg Dahl, Jon Robaidek and Jeremiah Auer (all WDNR) and the Wood County Wisconsin Conservation Corps;

Mead / McMillan — Brian Peters (Coordinator), Tony Geiger, Bill Hirt, Tom Meier, Tom Weber, Jon Robaidek and Bob Frank (all WDNR).

Outlying Areas — Michelle Kastler (Coordinator, WDNR), Jim Bragg, Connie Decker, Lillian Friedenfels, Ken Luepke, Mike Riegert, Mark Schmidt (WDNR) and Nadine Willett.

Special recognition -- Abby Sportsmen Club, Colby. WI.

Data obtained from "Central Wisconsin Prairie Chicken Census", compiled by WDNR.

Table 1. *Number Of Prairie Chicken Cocks on Central Wisconsin Booming Grounds 1950-2003.*

Year	Buena Vista	Leola	Paul Olson	Mead	McMillan	Dewey	Outlying Areas	Total
1950	550	232						
1951	550	183						
1952	265	132						
1953	344	146						
1954	256	162						
1955	305	110						
1956	299	109						
1957	239	114						
1958	297	126						
1959	169	72						
1960	157	56						
1961	135	46						
1962	157	44	54					
1963	150	37	50					
1964	175	38	38					
1965	165	21	43					
1966	183	20	62					
1967	141	10	66					
1968	139	12	71					
1969	104	28	57	43				
1970	141	78	62	54				
1971	198	77	47	102				
1972	234	88	76	108				
1973	155	46	94	121				
1974	126	46	116	96				
1975	138	52	135	118				
1976	131	45	114	119				
1977	213	75	145	154				
1978	365	82	186	212				
1979	438	53	189	211				
1980	480	79	228	187				
1981	550	75	302	180	14			1121
1982	535	69	256	163	13			1036
1983	359	49	188	97	4			697
1984	245	22	152	*	*			
1985	275	69	175	144	7			670
1986	194	47	152	*	*			
1987	193	56	194	110	25			578
1988	269	65	206	101	31			672
1989	182	64	124	128	37		56	591
1990	281	80	110	129	60		49	709
1991	216	84	91	101	64		70	626
1992	239	63	56	58	30		60	506
1993	265	65	93	65	24		45	557
1994	247	70	91	53	19	16	30	510
1995	275	87	83	38	24	+	31	538
1996	277	74	87	44	20	+	39	541
1997	334	97	100	59	9	+	22	541
1998	327	70	129	86	14	+	30	656
1999	341	89	139	92	14	0	24	699
2000	323	88	194	94	14	+	36	749
2001	252	69	174	69	5	+	17	586
2002	226	38	176	48	7	+	27	522
2003	269	34	183	49	9	?	20	564

* Blank spaces: surveys not conducted; prairie chickens may have been present
+ Birds present but not counted.

Table 2. *Summary of central Wisconsin prairie chicken surveys 1999-2003.*

	Number of Booming Grounds					Number of Booming Cocks					**2002/2003**	
Area	**1999**	**2000**	**2001**	**2002**	**2003**	**1999**	**2000**	**2001**	**2002**	**2003**	**BG %**	**Cocks %**
BUENA VISTA	32	31	29	28	23	341	323	252	226	269	0.82	1.19
LEOLA	11	12	10	8	10	89	88	69	38	34	1.25	0.89
PAUL OLSON	12	20	19	21	24	139	194	174	176	183	1.14	1.04
MEAD	14	18	13	13	10	92	94	69	48	49	0.77	1.02
MCMILLIAN	4	3	2	2	1	14	14	5	7	9	0.50	1.29
OUTLYING AREAS	5	8	6	7	4	24	36	17	27	20	0.57	0.74
DEWEY *	(0)	(+)	(+)	(+)	(?)	(0)	(+)	(+)	(+)	(?)	-	-
SEARLES *	(+)	(0)	(+)	(0)	(0)	(2)	(0)	(+)	(0)	(0)	-	-
Totals	**78**	**92**	**79**	**79**	**72**	**699**	**749**	**586**	**522**	**564**	**0.91**	**1.08**

* Numbers not included in totals

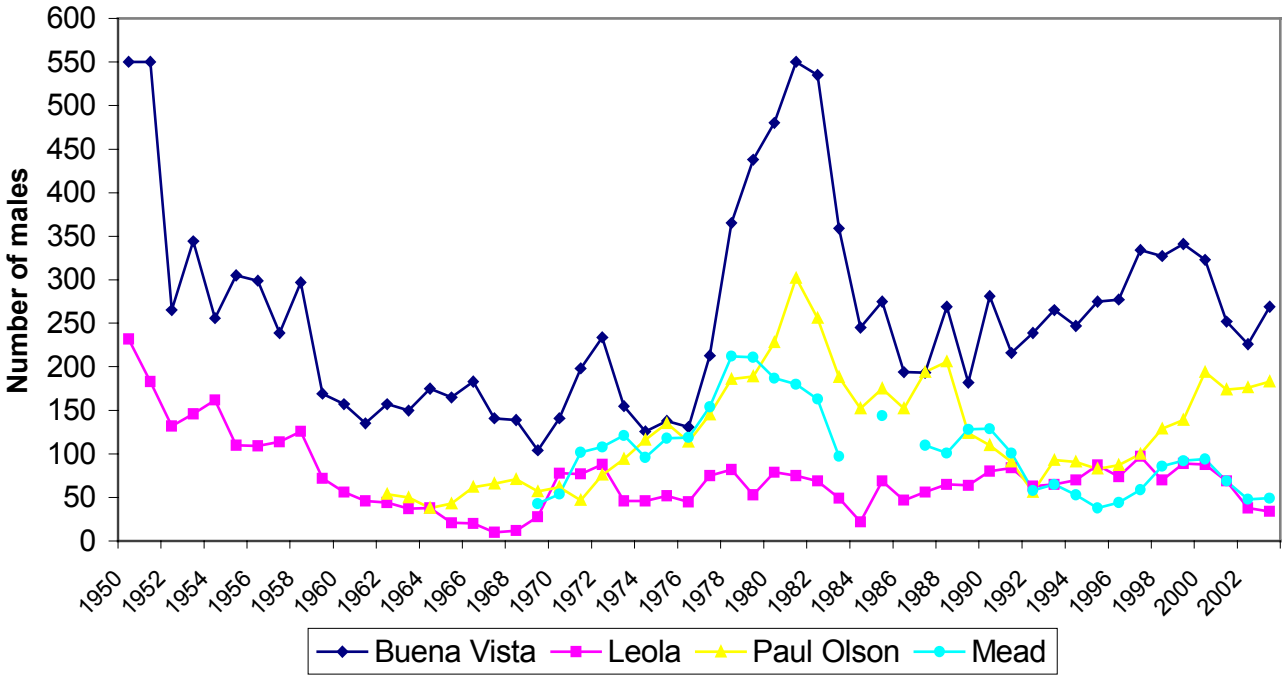

Figure 1. *The number of prairie chicken cocks on booming grounds from 1950-2003.*

Table 3. *The number of booming cocks at Buena Vista Marsh, 2002-2003.*

Booming grounds	Number of Booming Cocks		Booming grounds legal description
	2002	2003	2002
Bertotto	12	14	SE ¼ NW ¼ Sec 3 T22N R8E
Blue Top	4	0	
Coddington, SW	4	6	NW ¼ NE ¼ Sec 33 T22N R8E
Damon	0	19	NE ¼ NE ¼ Sec 29 T22N R8E
Dane	0	8	NW ¼ SW ¼ Sec 11 T21N R7E
Dorr	13	11	SW ¼ NW ¼ Sec 21 T22N R8E
Dorr, W	7	0	
Getzloff	0	3	SW ¼ NW ¼ Sec 36 T22N R7E
Goat Farm	5	15	NW ¼ SE ¼ Sec 25 T22N R7E
Hakes	17	17	N ½ SW ¼ Sec 27 T21N R7E
Hall	3	2	NE ¼ NW ¼ Sec 5 T21N R8E
Hanson	16	14	NE ¼ SW ¼ Sec 14 T21N R7E
Heath, NW	18	21	SE ¼ NW ¼ Sec 31 T22N R8E
John-B	10	8	NW ¼ SE ¼ Sec 17 T22N R8E
Kramer, E	1	0	
Krueger	6	2	SE ¼ NW ¼ Sec 10 T21N R7E
Lake	1	0	
Lundberg	0	6	NE ¼ NW ¼ Sec 22 T21N R7E
Lyden	8	0	
Marsh House, SE	1	0	
Meils (Sawyer)	9	9	NW ¼ NW ¼ Sec 7 T21N R8E
Middaugh	2	0	
Middaugh, North	3	0	
Pichelman	10	14	NE ¼ SW ¼ Sec 20 T21N R8E
Porter New 2002	3	0	
Richmeyer	5	5	SW ¼ SE ¼ Sec 5 T21N R8E
Rozner	12	22	SW ¼ SW ¼ Sec 8 T22N R8E
Serr	13	22	NE ¼ SW ¼ Sec 2 T21N R7E
Silo	14	21	NE ¼ NW ¼ Sec 35 T22N R7E
Society	3	0	
South SERR	0	6	NE ¼ NW ¼ Sec 11 T21N R7E
Sumner	18	15	SE ¼ NW ¼ Sec 29 T22N R8E
Zielinski	8	9	SW ¼ NE 1/4 Sec 6 T21N R8E
Total	**226**	**269**	19% increase from 2002

Table 4. *The number of booming cocks at Leola, 2002-2003.*

	Number Booming Cocks		Booming Grounds Legal Descriptions			
	2002	2003	2003			
Williams	12	10	SW	SE	9	20-7
Gillis	1	0				
E Gillis	6	3	NE	SW	16	20-7
Lovelace	6	8	SW	SE	15	20-7
Petriken E	0	1	NW	SE	21	20-7
Petriken south	0	2	NE	SW		20-7
Knoll	8	1	NW	SW	21	20-7
Lucas	2	1	SW	SE	28	20-7
SW Granery	0	2	NW	SE	22	20-7
Caves	2	0				
Vanatta	1	2	SW	NE	28	20-7
Vanatta E	0	4	SE	NE	28	20-7
Total	**38**	**34**				

Table 5. *The number of booming cocks at Paul J. Olson Wildlife Area, 2002-2003.*

Booming Grounds	Number Booming Cocks		Booming Grounds Legal Descriptions			
	2002	2003	2003			
Arpin	11	11	SW	NE	16	24-4
Arpin NW	0	1	NE	NW	16	24-4
Arpin SW	0	7	NE	SW	16	24-4
Back	11	7	SE	NW	4	23-5
Barr	1	3	NW	SW	22	24-6
Brockman (North)	12	9	SW	SE	25	24-4
Brockman (South)	0	6	SE	NW	6	23-5
Calbow New 2002	1	3	NE	NW	25	24-5
Dobbs	10	14	SE	NW	33	24-6
Eron	7	11	SE	NW	35	24-6
Flaig	11	4	NE	NW	31	24-6
Horn	8	6	SE	SW	6	23-4
Jisko	12	9	SW	NE	30	24-6
King	11	7	SE	NE	35	24-5
Kock/Pugh	17	17	NW	SW	34	24-5
Mann New 2002	1	0				
Mrozek (Carbow)	0	4	NE	NE	25	24-5
O'Connell	10	11	SW	NE	15	23-5
Osowski	10	6	NE	NW	32	24-6
Siegel	9	6	NW	NW	2	23-5
Tibbets	4	15	SE	NW	5	23-6
Vruwink	5	3	NW	NW	12	23-6
West Peters	11	15	NE	SW	14	24-6
Woboril	3	3	SE	SW	35	24-4
Zabawa	11	5	NE	SE	21	23-5
Total	**176**	**183**	**4.0% increase from 2002**			

Table 6. *The number of booming cocks at Mead/McMillan Wildlife Areas, 2002-2003.*

	Number Booming Cocks		Booming Grounds Legal Descriptions			
Mead	**2002**	**2003**	**2003**			
Berard (Wolfe)	6	4	SW	SW	11	25-6
Willie	3	0				
Roth-North	6	0				
Roth - South	0	9	NW	NE	31	25-7
Wayerski	3	5	SW	NE	26	25-6
Hunter (Gannigan)	0	1	NW	NE	21	25-6
Long Road	2	0				
Section 4	6	6	SE	NW	4	25-6
Little Birch	3	0				
Pool 15 (Pit)	4	3	NE	NE	2	25-5
Deer Run Rd	1	0				
Knebel	0	1	SE	SE	33	26-5
WHI east	3	4	NE	SE	28	26-5
WHI west	0	11	NW	SW	28	26-5
Smoky Hill	4	0				
Honey Island	6	5	SW	NE	34	26-5
Refuge South	1	0				
Total	**48**	**49**				
McMillan						
Hwy. E & Balsam	5	9	NE	NE	32	27-3
Little Rose Hwy 153	2	0				
Total	**7**	**9**				

Table 7. *The number of booming cocks in the outlying areas, 2002-2003. Four active booming grounds located in year 2003 with a total of 20 booming cocks in Sherman (1), Unity (1), Colby (1) and Hixon (1) Townships of Clark County.*

Number Booming Cocks		Booming Grounds Legal Descriptions			
2002	**2003**	**2003**			
1	0				
0	1	NW	NE	4	T26N R1E
2	0				
8	0				
0	10	SE	NW	10	T27N R1E
3	0				
6	2	SW	NW	25	T28N R1E
2	0				
5	0				
0	7	NW	NE	23	T29N R2W
Total **27**	**20**	**26% decrease from 2002**			