

Sharp-tailed Grouse

The Sharp-tailed Grouse is one of four species of North American grouse that inhabit a broad range of plant communities dominated by grasses and shrubs where males engage in communal breeding displays. Historically this species was found in steppe, grassland, and mixed-shrub habitats throughout much of central and northern North America. The sharptail is a large grouse, somewhat larger than the ruffed grouse, that lives in open grassy or brushland areas. Sharp-tailed grouse are a mottled brown and gray. During spring, the male's eyebrows are yellow and its air-inflated throat sacks are lavender.



During the summer and fall, sharptails eat a variety of weed seeds and small grain. During the winter, buds and twig ends of arctic birch, paper birch and aspen are favored. Chicks eat mainly insects during the summer.

During spring mating season, males will try to attract females by making coos and clucks, stomping their feet, and clicking their tail feathers. Male sharp-tailed grouse perform a courtship dance. Each spring, as many as 25 males gather in a grassy area and begin to display. The same dancing ground, called a lek, is used each year if the habitat remains unchanged. Females visit the lek and mate with the best displaying male. The female nests in grass or beneath a shrub, usually near the dancing area and lays 10 to 14 eggs.



Before European settlement, the sharp-tailed grouse was the most common grouse. Indians call the sharptail "fire bird" or "fire grouse" because of it depended on habitat that was kept open with fires that killed the trees and brush.

