

*The Ruffed Grouse is a common, but declining breeder in the Hudson River Valley.*

### Conservation Status

This bird is considered a Species of Greatest Conservation Need in New York. Partners in Flight regards it as a Species of Regional Concern in Bird Conservation Regions 14 and 28. Breeding Bird Survey data indicate a severe decline statewide since 1966. NYS Breeding Bird Atlas data indicate a decline in distribution in the Hudson River Valley in the past 20 years.



### Identification

This large chicken-like bird that has two color morphs, called gray and red morphs. In both color morphs, it has a mottled brown, gray, black and buff plumage overall, except for the tail, which has a distinct broad, dark band near its end and a white tip. In spring, the male displays by strutting on fallen logs with his tail fanned and his neck feathers ruffed and uses his wings to produce a hollow, drumming courtship sound of progressively faster thumps. All of this is aimed at attracting a mate.

### Habitat

It inhabits brushy, successional to mature hardwood and mixed forests, usually with birch or aspen. Females and young prefer areas with a dense understory and fairly open herbaceous ground cover. Early successional habitat such as regenerating clear-cuts or old burn sites are ideal. The grouse will roost on the ground, in trees, or in deep snow when conditions allow. These birds require several cover types, including drumming sites, nesting sites, brood-rearing, and feeding sites as well as winter cover. Males select drumming sites on logs situated in dense stands of hardwood saplings.

### Food

The Ruffed Grouse feeds by gleaning the ground and vegetation for seeds, buds, flowers, berries, catkins, leaves, insects, spiders, and snails. The young eat mainly insects and spiders. Aspen, birch, alder, hazelnut buds, and willow catkins are important food resources in winter and spring.

### Nesting

The nest is a shallow depression among leaf litter on the ground in dense cover at the base of a tree, stump, fallen log, or rock. Preferred nest sites are in fairly open hardwood stands. The nest is located at ground level to give nesting females an open view of their surroundings and permit quick escape from predators.

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**Threats**

- Habitat loss due to suburban development.
- Habitat loss due to maturation of early-successional deciduous forests.
- Forest fragmentation.
- Destruction of understory due to browsing by high density of white-tailed deer.
- West Nile Virus.

**Management Recommendations**

SEE THE RUFFED GROUSE SOCIETY'S CONSERVATION PLAN FOR VERY DETAILED MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS (visit <http://www.ruffedgrousesociety.org/>). The Ruffed Grouse Society (RGS) actively participates in the conservation and management of Ruffed Grouse and other early-successional forest wildlife species through its Management Area Program project. RGS staff biologists provide technical assistance to individuals interested in creating Ruffed Grouse habitat on private lands.

- Sustain aspen-birch forest types wherever possible.
- Maintain a dense shrub understory to provide nesting habitat.
- Distribute habitat patches so that food sources and important protective habitats are in close proximity to one another or connected by corridors of small patches of adequate protective cover.
- Control the size of white-tail deer herds by hunting or other management practices.

**Adapted from Dessecker et al. 2006 and Rusch et al. 2000.**

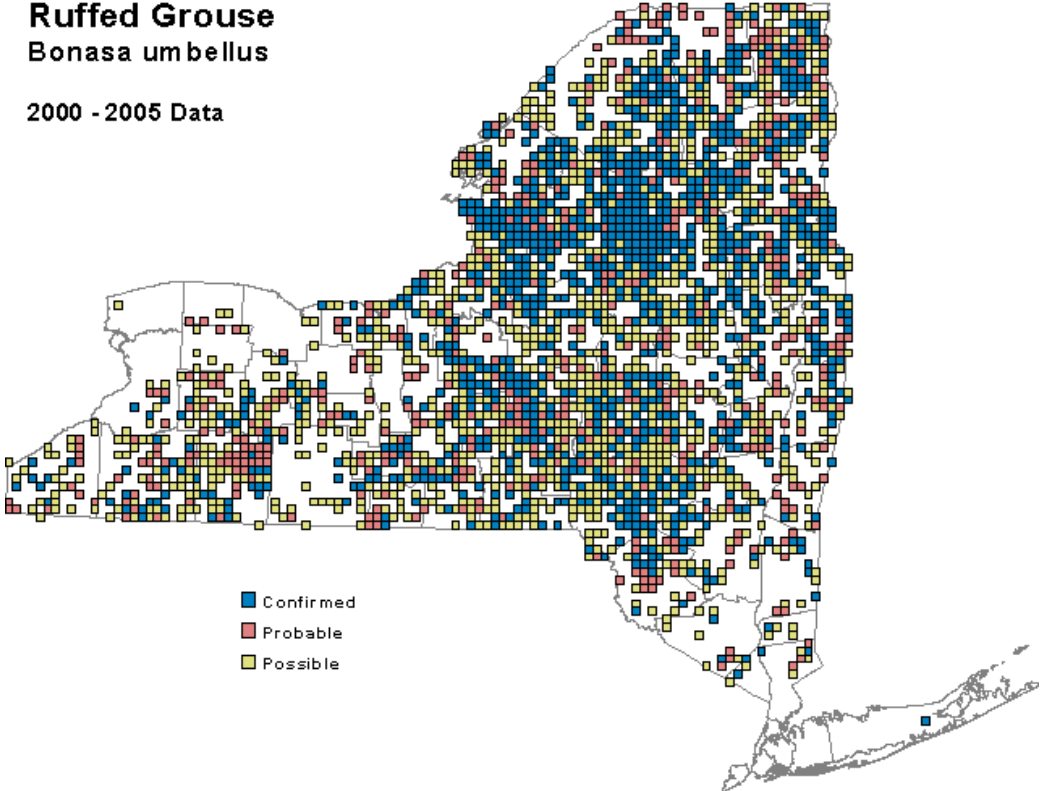
**For additional information, see the following references:**

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### NYS BREEDING BIRD ATLAS COMPARATIVE DATA

**Ruffed Grouse**  
*Bonasa umbellus*

2000 - 2005 Data



**Ruffed Grouse**  
*Bonasa umbellus*

1980 - 1985 Data

