

CALLING ALL PTARMIGAN HUNTERS!

Photo by Ron Wolf



Have you been hunting white-tailed ptarmigan lately? If not, have you seen any white-tailed ptarmigan lately? The DFG wants to document recent ptarmigan sightings in California, as well as determine how many people hunt these elusive alpine dwellers.

The white-tailed ptarmigan, *Lagopus leucura*, is the smallest bird in the grouse family. Adults are 12 to 13 inches long, making them roughly the same size as the common pigeon. The average weight is 12 to 15 ounces.

In winter, this bird is pure white except for a black beak and eyes. In summer, it has a mottled and barred brown head, breast, and back with white wings, belly, and tail.

Ptarmigan are found in the mountains of western United States, Canada and Alaska. They were introduced to California in 1971 and 1972 into alpine (above the tree line) habitats in the Sierra Nevada at Eagle Peak and Twin Lakes, Mono County. Today ptarmigan occupy areas of Alpine County, extreme eastern Fresno, Madera, Mariposa, and Tuolumne counties, and extreme western Mono County. White-tailed ptarmigan prefer areas with rock cover and low alpine shrubs.

The DFG established a hunting season for white-tailed ptarmigan in 1989 and awarded a limited number of hunting permits through a lottery drawing. The lottery was discontinued by the third season due to very low hunter interest. In fact, ptarmigan are apparently seldom hunted in California; in its mailing to a random sample of California hunters, the DFG's annual Game Take Hunter Survey consistently records very few ptarmigan hunters.

The next white-tailed ptarmigan season in California runs Sept. 10-18, 2011. The bag and possession limit is two per day or season.

REPORT WHITE-TAILED PTARMIGAN OBSERVATIONS TO:

JESUS R. GARCIA
CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME
1812 NINTH STREET SACRAMENTO, CA 95811
(916) 445-3709 - PHONE
(916) 445-4048 - FAX
JGarcia@dfg.ca.gov