



Sharptails in Action

Story by Shawn Perich
Photos by Gordon Court

The extraordinary photo on the cover of Grouse Partnership News and the pictures on this page were taken at a lek near Veteran, Alberta by Gordon Court. As the provincial wildlife status biologist, most of his work is with endangered species, but he also finds time to photograph birds and other wildlife.

He was able to take these sharptail pictures with the help of Doug Manzer (see his story on page 9), who spent several years studying sharptails for his PhD. Monitoring the breeding season, Manzer notified Court when the greatest number of females were visiting the lek. This is when the males reach the peak of their courting displays.

The most intense breeding activity

generally occurs around sunrise, a low-light period from a photographer's point of view. Court says the stop-action detail in these photos was possible due to digital photography.

"With a digital camera, you can shoot at far lower light levels," says Court. "You can freeze the action, which isn't possible with film."

Court really enjoys photographing raptors, though he says grouse are a close second. He has taken pictures of sage grouse and ruffed grouse, as well as sharptails. However, he learned the tricks of the trade photographing penguins in Antarctica.

"I really got into photography when I was down there," he says. "I carried a camera everywhere."

