

Fright in the forest: The sudden flight of the grouse



BRAD TRUMBO

UPLAND PURSUITS

A heavy fog hung over the ridgetop, cloaking both hunter and elk in a dripping haze. The ponderosa pines wore a coat of white fuzz over their somber, green needles — the only green to be had in early December. The mercury hung around 35 degrees Fahrenheit, leaving conditions somewhere between miserable and tolerable.

Stalking quietly along an old logging road, I stopped to gaze upon a long-forgotten cable log skidder perched on a landing below the road. What was once red or orange steel had been replaced with a cancerous, dingy rust and a variety of brown and blue lichens. Imagining the logs being transported to the ridgetop, I turning to continue in the assumed direction of elk.

The road began winding down and cut deeply into the mountainside. A young fir stood at the toe of the uphill slope, flanked by rose and elderberry, growing in the opportune light of the road opening. There was nothing remarkable about this particular spot; however, I recall the location perfectly as the details of terrifying situations either scar us for life or become tucked into the deepest, darkest corners of memory, only to resurface with the assistance of a psychologist. A blue grouse exploded from beneath the fir, nearly taking my right leg out on its panic-stricken flight to safety.

Nearly everyone who has set foot in the major mountain chains of this great nation has suffered near cardiac arrest thanks to our continental “King of the Woods,” the ruffed grouse. The vibration of wingbeats and leaf litter left tussled in their wake is enough to spook the



A large male dusky grouse hunted among ridgetop conifers.



National Park Service/Contributed Photo
A sooty grouse in breeding display. Notice the gray band around the tip of the tail fan and yellow air sacs on the neck.

most seasoned mountaineer, but add that explosive power to a bird the size of domestic chicken and you will come to realize a terror rivaled only by a charging grizzly, unless expecting the bird sitting somewhere beyond the nose of a pointing dog.

I am either an old timer or nitwit because to me, blue grouse are blue grouse, but ornithologists recently suggested otherwise. By recently, I mean blue grouse were thought two distinct species — the dusky and the sooty — in the Lewis and Clark days. They were then lumped into “blue grouse” in the 1900s, and again separated in 2006, but are still referred to collectively as blue grouse.

Current range maps of dusky and sooty grouse show the sooty grouse hugging the western Sierra Nevada, Cascade, and Coast ranges, while the dusky grouse occurs east of the Cascades through the Rockies.

Physically, sooty and dusky males vary in appearance. Our



Jeff Foott/National Park Service
Male blue grouse with air sacs inflated during a mating season display.

local dusky males boast a solid black tail fan, red neck air sacs that are displayed during the breeding season, and an overall brown appearance. Sooty grouse have a darker overall body appearance, a lighter tail fan with an ashen band on the tip and yellow air sacs. It is possible for these species to overlap and interbreed along their east-

ern Cascades dividing line.

While both species overwinter in coniferous forest, their breeding habitats vary widely and include shrub-steppe, steppe, mountain shrub, open coniferous forest, clearcuts, old growth forest and alpine tundra. Both species nest on the ground beneath the protection of plant cover and within one mile of conifers.

Both species are managed for hunting and big dusky grouse can be found in Northeastern Oregon’s Blue Mountains. Dusky grouse typically occupy higher elevations than ruffed grouse. When you find dusky grouse, continue to hunt that approximate elevation. Preferred habitat includes timber edges, open timbered slopes and mountain meadows with nearby water. Insects and berries, such as currant and chokecherry, are good food sources in September. Later in the season, dusky grouse move higher in elevation into the conifers for winter.

While I prefer hunting birds with

a dog, blue grouse can be found by simply hiking along the edge of clearcuts and other changes in vegetation types and densities, and can be found mid-morning pecking soft greens on the ridgetops under conifers. I have never encountered more than a couple birds at a time, but rumor has it that dusky grouse can be found in greater numbers in close proximity to one another.

October is a fine month to hike the grouse woods. I can think of no finer grouse hunt than walking semi-open ridgetops behind a couple pointing dogs as the daytime highs decline and the yellows and reds of autumn foliage fleck the conifer forests. The golden hours of the shoulders of the day are calling, as is the impressive flush and humble beauty of our big dusky grouse of the Blues.

Brad Trumbo is a fish and wildlife biologist and outdoor writer in Waitsburg, Washington, where he also actively serves the Walla Walla-based Blue Mountain Pheasants Forever chapter. For tips and tales of outdoor pursuits and conservation, visit www.bradtrumbo.com.

ON THE SLATE

Saturday, Oct. 16

Prep volleyball

Nixyaawii at Wallowa, 10 a.m.
Griswold at Joseph, 10 a.m.
Nyssa at Irrigon, 11 a.m.
Vale at Umatilla, 11:30 a.m.
Nixyaawii at Joseph, 1 p.m.
Griswold at Wallowa, 1 p.m.
Pilot Rock vs. Grant Union at Enterprise, 1:30 p.m.

Vale at Irrigon, 2 p.m.
Pilot Rock at Enterprise, 3 p.m.

Burns at Umatilla, 3 p.m.

Prep girls soccer
Four Rivers at Irrigon, 11 a.m.
Ontario at McLoughlin, noon

Nyssa at Riverside, noon
Prep boys soccer

Four Rivers at Irrigon, 1 p.m.
Ontario at McLoughlin, 1:30 p.m.

Nyssa at Riverside, 2 p.m.
College men’s soccer

Blue Mountain at Treasure Valley, 2:15 p.m.
Southern Oregon at Eastern Oregon, 4 p.m.

College women’s soccer
Blue Mountain at Treasure Valley, noon

Southern Oregon at Eastern Oregon, 6:30 p.m.

College volleyball
Eastern Oregon at Walla Walla, 8 p.m.

College cross-country
Eastern Oregon at LC State Warrior Invitational, TBA

Tickets:

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The ease of technology turns most any smartphone into a ticket scanner, provided the venue has a cell signal. An app is used to scan tickets. For a single high school event, the battery usage and amount of data used to run the app is minimal.

Schools will no longer be responsible for large sums of cash. Money for digital tickets goes directly to an OSAA account, with no cash or credit card slips left at the site.

Digital ticketing also will give a more accurate attendance for events.

The first few rounds of the playoffs will prepare fans for the state finals, where only digital tickets will be accepted.

“At OSAA State Championship events, there will be no cash transactions or point of sale system on site,” Stanfield said. “All people entering the event must have a digital ticket.”

Please try to not spend a lot of time lying flat on your back. Lying on your stomach and in different positions will help your body to get air into all areas of your lungs

It is recommended to change your position every 30 minutes to 2 hours rotating as at right. Please note sitting up is better than lying on your back.

Continue to monitor oxygen saturations at 8AM and 1PM.

CARING FOR COVID-19 SYMPTOMS AT HOME

<p>Hand hygiene</p>	<p>Rest</p>	<p>Social distancing</p>
<p>Use fever-reducing medicine</p>	<p>Drink plenty of fluids</p>	<p>Clean/disinfect surfaces regularly</p>

TIMED POSITION CHANGES

Use a pulse oximeter if possible to check your oxygen saturations 15 minutes after each position to ensure oxygen saturation has not decreased. If your oxygen drops below 90%, go to the ER or call 911

<p>1 30 minutes to 2 hours lying fully prone (bed flat)</p>	<p>4 30 minutes to 2 hours lying on left side (bed flat)</p>
<p>2 30 minutes to 2 hours lying on right side (bed flat)</p>	<p>5 30 minutes to 2 hours lying prone again</p>
<p>3 30 minutes to 2 hours sitting up (30-60 degrees) by adjusting head of the bed</p>	<p>6 Continue to repeat the cycle...</p>

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