

RUFFED GROUSE DANCE

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It has been many years since I have seen a Ruffed Grouse drumming on a log. My wife has never witnessed this event. On a pleasant spring morning we drive to the Qu'Appelle Valley and then along an old trail in a cow pasture, stopping every now and then to listen. We come to a muddy part on the trail and decide that it is too far to walk for a tow truck should I not make it through. We get out of the car and hear what seems to be someone trying to start a small gasoline engine without success. Had I not known better, I would have dismissed the

sound as that. I know that it is a Ruffed Grouse drumming.

We make our way into the bush, stopping every few minutes and wait for the grouse to drum so that we can locate him. Finally we spot him sitting on a large moss-covered log. We get too close and the grouse disappears. We go back to the car and get the blind and set it up about 40 feet from the log and leave. We continue along the trail on foot and hear another grouse drumming. We also locate this bird, come back to the car



Ruffed Grouse before display

Keith Barr



Ruffed Grouse begins display

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Drumming

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and leave, planning to be back the next morning.

However, the best laid plans of grouse and men . . . we don't get back for two days. The grouse should be well accustomed to the blind by now. We walk slowly into the bush, trying to be as quiet as possible, but with size 10 hiking boots walking on dry leaves and sticks it is not possible to be quiet. We stop every now and then and wait for the grouse to drum. We get close to the blind and the grouse is still on his log. We inch closer. We are about to enter the blind when I get the idea that if he will let us get this close, maybe we can sit in front of the blind. We inch in front of the blind and set up the camera. The grouse has not moved and starts to drum. He has accepted us as being

harmless. We sit, watch and take pictures. A Red-tailed Hawk flies overhead. The grouse cocks his head sideways and stretches his neck to get a better view, then returns to his drumming.

End of Act One as he slowly struts stage left and disappears into a thicket. After a ten-minute intermission the star reappears and repeats Act One. It seems to me we have been watching this performance long enough. I am going to see how close I can get. I slowly move forward and get to within 23 feet before he reluctantly saunters stage left and disappears into the thicket. We pick up the cameras and blind and leave feeling quite pleased that the grouse had been willing to accept us as we were only about 35 feet away.