

# Nature Notes

## The Blue and Ruffed Grouse

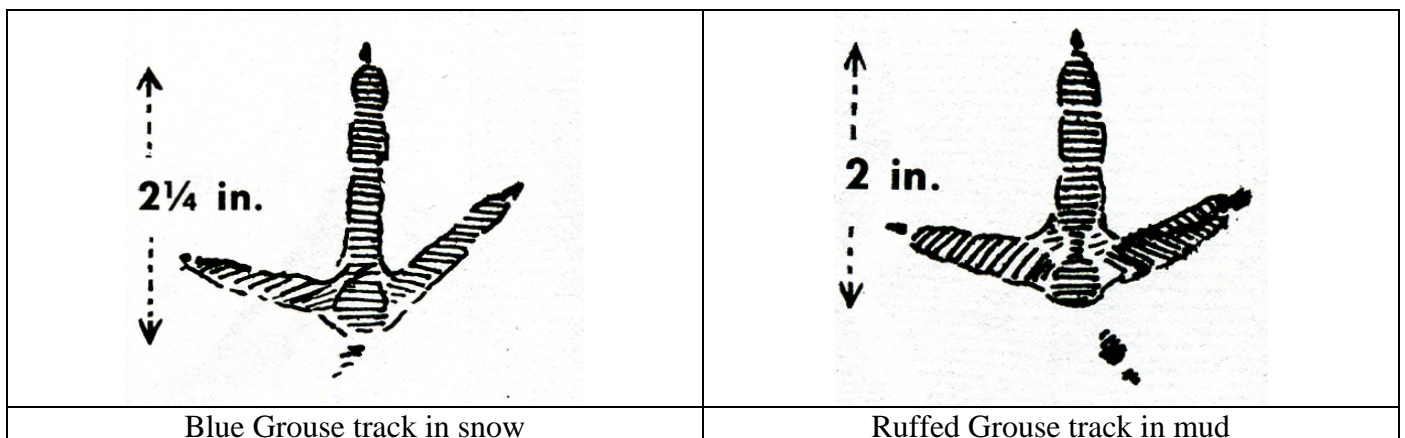


Both the Blue and Ruffed Grouse can be found in the Kimberley Nature Park throughout the year. The larger Blue Grouse (about 20 inches in length) would most likely be found on the more open, coniferous woods around Sunflower Hill and the Ruffed Grouse (seventeen inches in length) can be found throughout the Park in deciduous and mixed forests.

In the spring, the males of both species have distinguishable mating displays of opening their air sacs and flashing their brightly colored combs. The low pulsing hoot of the Blue Grouse and the rapid wing beating of the Ruffed Grouse alert females of the species to their availability. The grouse will make their nests on the ground in vegetation. The Blue Grouse will lay 5 -7 eggs in May which will be incubated for approximately 26 days. The Ruffed Grouse lays a few more eggs and incubates them for less time. By the end of September, the juveniles will have separated from their parents. In both species, the male will stay with the same female throughout the spring, summer, and fall but the grouse become solo individuals during the winter.

During the winter, grouse can roost by diving into the snow and then burrowing deeper. They also perch in coniferous trees where the dense branches provide protection and shelter. Flight for grouse is limited but it does allow the birds to fly into nearby trees when flushed by trail users or a possible predator such as a fox or goshawk. Diet in the winter for the Blue Grouse would mostly consist of conifer needles while the Ruffed Grouse would dine primarily on aspen buds or other buds, leaves, or seeds.

All grouse have legs with feathers which are developed for walking with three long forward pointing toes used for scratching earth and a small hind toe. When you're snowshoeing or cross-country skiing in the Nature Park this winter, watch for these easily identifiable tracks in the snow. You might be surprised how common and active the grouse appear to be by their tracks but how difficult they are to actually see!



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