

BOGDIVERSITY THURSDAY



—*from Head Naturalist Clinton*

Ruffed Grouse

POST #50—December 1, 2022

Happy December all! Bogdiversity Thursday posts are back with our 50th post in this series! So far, we have shared information on 133 different species that call the Sax-Zim Bog home. If you are keeping track, that is 4% of the biodiversity found in the greater Sax-Zim Bog! Today, let's take a look at species #134 for the Bogdiversity series: Ruffed Grouse.

Ruffed Grouse and Sharp-tailed Grouse are the only two grouse species regularly found in the greater Sax-Zim Bog. Of the two species, Ruffed Grouse are quite common. The cryptic plumage of this species hides it well in the forested habitats of the region where they nest, forage, and overwinter. So far this late-fall/early-winter, Ruffed Grouse have been fairly common and easy to see. Later in the winter, however, Ruffed Grouse can become very difficult to find.

Part of the reason Ruffed Grouse get a little more difficult to find during the winter has to do with their biology. In the winter, with

cold temperatures and food becoming difficult to find, Ruffed Grouse try to conserve their energy by snow roosting!

Snow roosting is done by a number of species adapted to cold weather conditions, but grouse in our area utilize this method to conserve energy frequently. Very simply, the grouse buries itself in the snow, insulating itself against surface temperatures.

Temperatures underneath the snow stay consistent through the winter, maintaining temperatures near 30 degrees even when air temperatures might dip well into the negative realm. While in their snow tunnels, grouse metabolisms do not need to work as hard to keep them warm and Ruffed Grouse may spend 18 hours or more under the snow during the winter. They will emerge pre-dawn and at dusk to feed on catkins, leaf buds, and fruits. After foraging, they drop back to the ground to find new snow roosting sites.

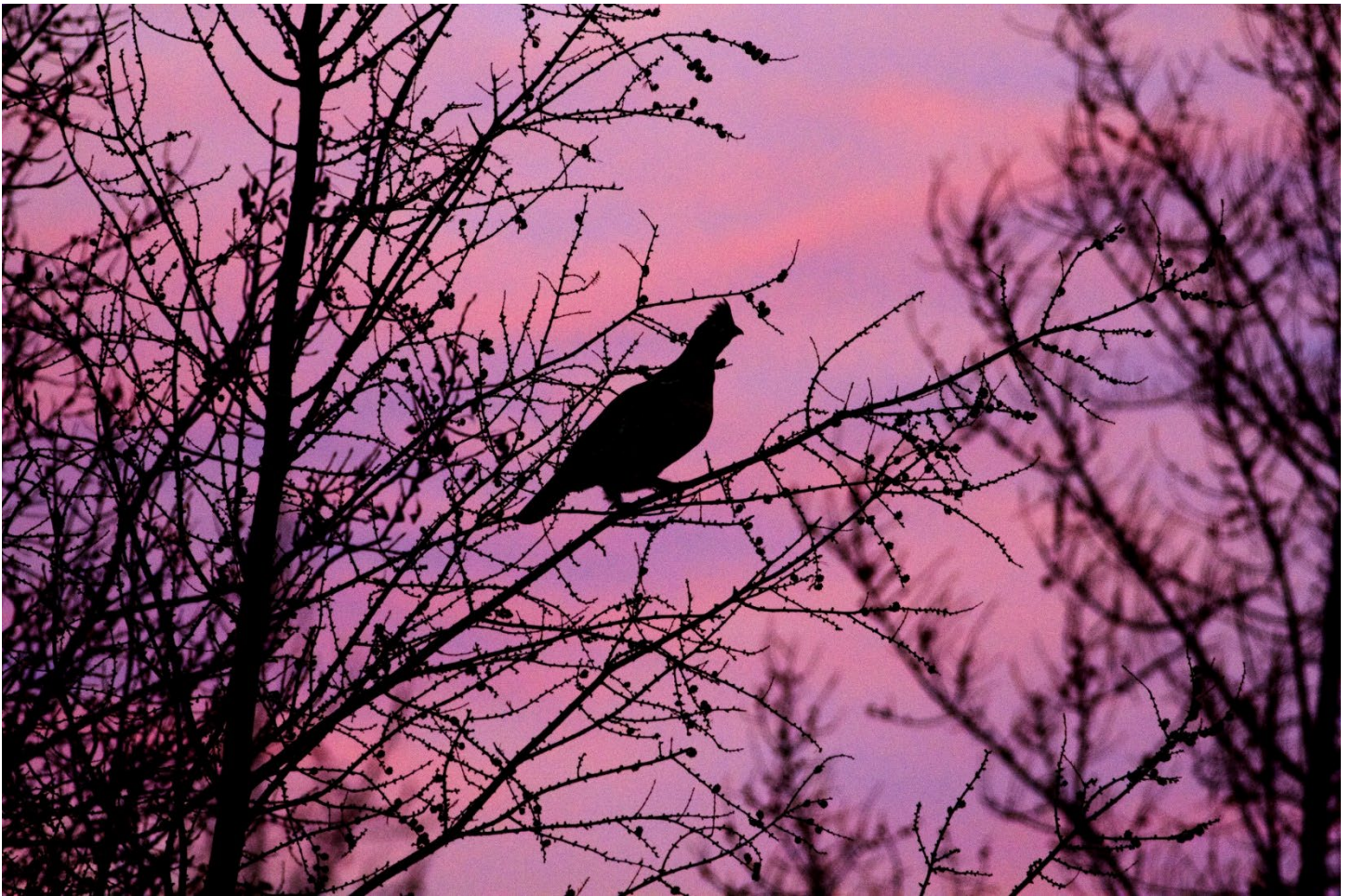
Ruffed Grouse are a popular game bird in Minnesota and across most of its range in North America. It can be found well into central Alaska and as far south as northern Georgia. The forested habitats preferred by Ruffed Grouse are shared by other bird species in decline (like Veery, Golden-winged Warbler, and American Woodcock) and conservation efforts for all four species are closely tied.

More information about this lovely species included in the photo below!

(Photos below by Sparky Stensaas)



Ruffed Grouse are a handsome bird, with cryptic patterns across their bodies. They have crests which can be raised and lowered, especially when agitated.



Dawn and dusk are great times to find Ruffed Grouse. They often forage high up in trees and shrubs and stand out against the sunrise or sunset. While looking for Great Gray Owls, keep your eyes peeled for grouse as well!



Snow roosting is a great way to keep energy needs lower during very cold weather. Exit holes from grouse roosting look very similar to plunge holes made by owls when feeding!



Male and female Ruffed Grouse both have "ruffs" of feathers around their necks. The best way to separate male and female grouse is to look at their tails! Male Ruffed Grouse typically have a complete black band at the tip of their tail. Females usually lack a complete black band on their tails. If you have good enough photos, you can also check out the spots on their feathers on their uppertail coverts! Male Ruffed Grouse have two black spots per feather, with females having one large spot. Using this information, is the bird above a female or male?



Diverse forest types are important to the life cycle of Ruffed Grouse. They rely on old, fallen, and dead trees for drumming perches. Males display from these drumming logs and will use different logs within their territories to display.