



Black Grouse Lekking trip

Ulveholtet, near Halden



Building our Shelter

We built shelters using many tall slender cut trees.

We learned to tie different knots and discussed how best to secure the camp. We used dry grass to cover the front and left a small gap for us to watch through.

We secured our telescopes in the evening to be able to easily access them during the night. We had actually chosen a very wet area to place our shelter and the ground was quite soggy.





Cooked Dinner

We worked in our nature place groups to prepare a cooked dinner.

Lena, Lea and I cooked a vegan curry with veggies, chickpeas, mushrooms, tomato, and coconut milk :P

Black Grouse

The Black Grouse is a beautiful and rare species of gamebird. Males are often called Blackcocks, and the females are called Greyhens. Males will have black feathers mixed with red and white colors on their wings and wattle. and are known for their lyre-shaped tails.



Female feather



"Double" feather and
afterfeather



Male lyre-shaped tail feather

Drappings

Male grouses can produce white droppings during lekking period due to high level of hormones

Grouses eat the pollen from plants like the one below which causes their faeces to be golden yellow.



Only two polygamous birds regularly perform lekking behaviour in Britain – the other is the capercaillie. Male black grouse, called blackcocks, gather at their leks all year, with the peak period in April and May. This is when females, 'greyhens', attend the display sites to select mates. The males assemble at dawn and display by fanning out their white undertail feathers and lyre-shaped outer-tail feathers, while posturing, flutter-jumping and uttering continual bubbling sounds. 'Lek' comes from the Old Norse for 'play' but it is a serious business, with males battling for territory and to secure matings.

Dominant adult males take the central locations; subordinates and juveniles occupy the outside. Today, British leks usually have fewer than 10 males, though up to 30 is possible, with larger leks attracting more female visits and subsequent matings. First-year males seldom mate, but their presence increases the mating success of the adults.



Understand black grouse lekking behaviour

5 key facts about black grouse lekking and 3 lek stages to look out for.

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Lekking

1 Arrival In spring blackcocks fly into their traditional arenas just before first light, and take up their positions arranged by rank.

2 Display They perform energetic displays – fanning tails, posturing, jumping and sometimes making short flights over the lek.

3 Mating Females choose the fittest male occupying a central position in the arena. There is no pair bond – males do not help rear the chicks.

Lekking

1 Lek sites Leks are situated in open areas away from woodland, which provide good acoustics and visibility. They are located on areas of short vegetation, such as grass or on tracks. In Scandinavia some leks even take place on frozen lakes.

2 Mid-air fights Only a handful of males at a lek manage to copulate. Fighting is a prerequisite for success, because that is how males defend their territory – they face off and leap into the air on whirring wings.

3 Tail fanning Competing males spread their long, curving, black tail feathers into a wide fan. They contrast strongly with the brilliant white undertail covert feathers, raised vertically in the centre.

4 Wattles Males have a bright red wattle above each eye, which becomes engorged with blood and swollen when displaying. The size of the wattle is linked to testosterone levels, and may be a visual signal by which females can assess male quality.

5 Courtship calls Two distinct calls are made. The first is a bubbling or 'rookooing' sound – a continuous vocalisation produced with the aid of air sacs in the neck. The second is a guttural hiss. On clear, still mornings black grouse leks can be heard from up to 4km away.

Using a telescope

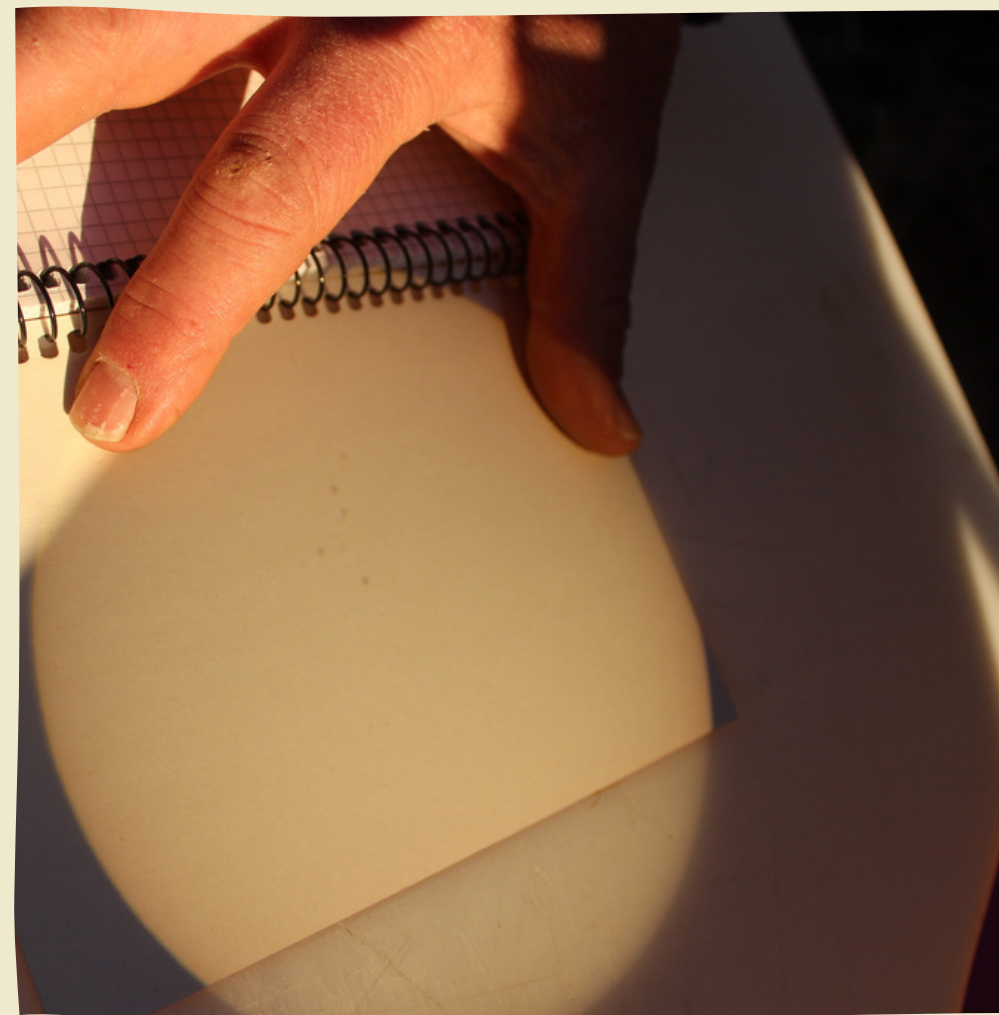
We learned that it is very dangerous to look directly at the sun through the telescope. We quickly understood how much light energy is being concentrated through the lens by testing its heat on our skin. Some people could hold their skin to the concentrated light for longer than others.



Stellar vision

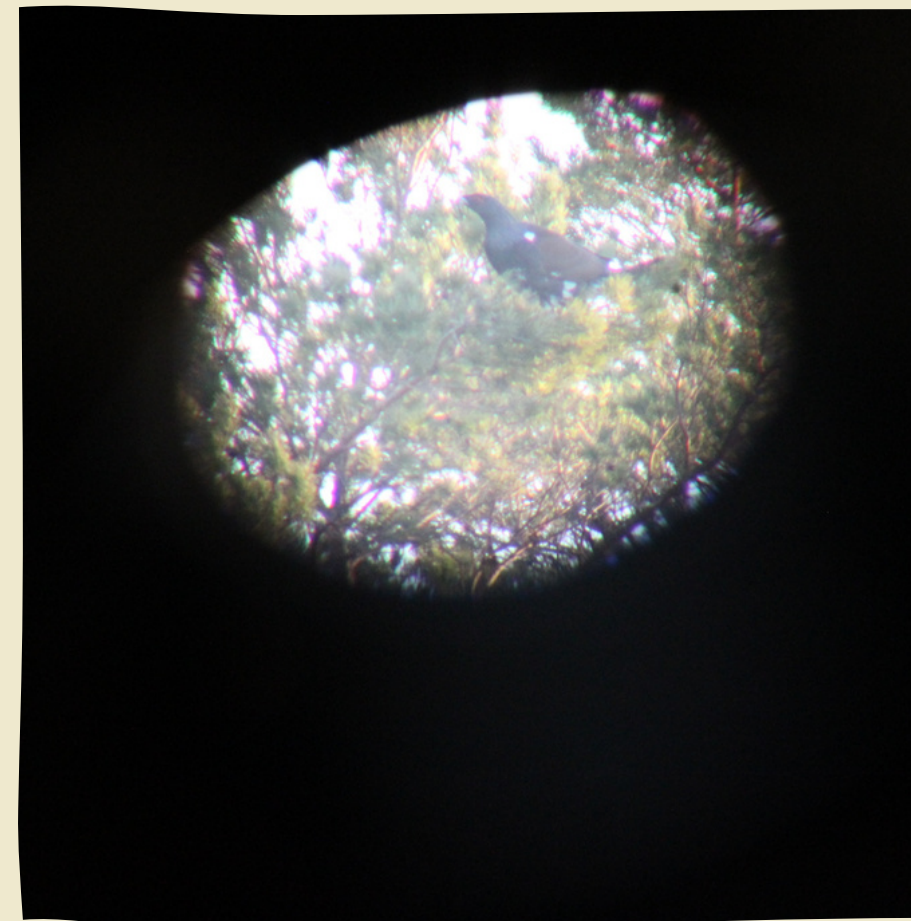
We observed little black dots on the moon's surface when we reflected its image onto a white surface

Some people downloaded apps to be able to determine the locations of planets and stars



Using the telescope

While we were trying out the telescopes, a capercaillie landed right above our camp and was cooing in the tree. He stayed there for about one hour and did not show signs of fear of aggression. Rune believed that he felt very confident to do this due to the high levels of hormones present during the lekking period.





Myredderkopp

Raft spider

Dolomedes fimbriatus



Photo: Rune Aae