

## Black Grouse Hide





### **What to expect:**

When the birds first arrive on the lek site it will be too dark to attempt any photography but you can sit back and enjoy one of the finest bird sounds in the UK. As it becomes lighter you can begin to shoot using high ISO settings and then switch to a lower ISO when the light levels increase. The site is in a very open situation and receives good light but there is the slight shadow of a nearby hill for around 30 - 45 minutes after sunrise. On a sunny day the lek will receive direct sunshine from around 06:30. On average you can expect approx. 2-3 hours of good light for photography with birds present.

The males defend their 'patch' on the lek and there can be frequent fights between rival birds. The males also perform flutter jumps, leaping up into the air. Any action of this kind usually requires a shutter speed of 1/500<sup>th</sup> or faster to freeze the movement. The birds are more static at other times allowing shots to be taken at slower shutter speeds. The females can visit the lek at any time but do so most typically before around 06:30. Mating usually takes place somewhere on or close to the lek arena although it is not common to witness this. Females may not be present on some days. The birds can be spooked by birds of prey in the area and may fly off for a period of 10 minutes or longer. If they fly off after 08:00 it's unlikely they will come back. Activity usually subsides around 08:00 and the birds will usually leave the lek sometime before 09:00.

### **Meeting Arrangements**

We will meet you in the Car Park for Balmoral Castle at 03:15 (directions will be sent out to you at the time of booking) we will leave the car park no later than 03:30. **It is absolutely crucial that you arrive on time as we must leave promptly at 03:30 and we cannot wait for latecomers!**

If you are unable to make it to the meeting point by this time please try to contact us on 07519 151957 but be aware that mobile reception is not always reliable.

We will return you to the car park after your photography session.

### **Recommended Camera equipment**

You will need a lens in the range of 200-500mm. A longer lens is better suited to close-up portraits while a shorter lens will allow you to shoot birds fighting and birds in habitat. The black grouse display over a relatively small area and will be between 8m and 20m from the hide at most times. The hide has a solid wooden shelf with threaded bolts that will accept a standard tripod head so you can attach your own tripod head and there is no need to bring the tripod legs. If you prefer you can also work from a bean bag and we can provide these if required.



A camera that is capable of shooting in low light using high ISO settings with low noise is an advantage although not essential. You will typically want to shoot using ISO settings of between 400 and 3200, starting at the higher settings in the first light of the day.

### **Other recommended gear**

Headtorch or other torch

Warm and waterproof footwear

Warm clothing (temperatures could be as low as -5°C. Around 0-8°C is the norm)

Hat and gloves

### **Hide usage and etiquette**

1. Your photography session will begin at around 04:30 once we have set you up in the hide (the birds usually arrive approx 1 hour before sunrise) and will end at around 09:00 once the birds have left the lek site.
2. You will be guided to the hide, which involves a 10 minute walk over steep uneven ground and through heather. It is very likely to be wet underfoot and can be slippery. Please bear in mind it will also be dark so this is not a trivial matter and you should be of reasonable fitness and be able to carry your own gear to the hide.
3. The hide is designed for 3 persons and has 3 camera ports available. Seating is provided.
4. Please choose which lens you wish to use and leave this in position for the entire session. **DO NOT CHANGE LENSES WHILST THE BIRDS ARE PRESENT ON THE LEK** as this is likely to cause them to fly away and cause unacceptable disturbance.
5. Although the birds are accustomed to lens movement try to avoid moving your lens too quickly and if the birds look nervous then keep your lens still.
6. **DO NOT LEAVE THE HIDE** unless in a dire emergency. Your guide will return at around 0900 to get you out and return you to the car park. If it is absolutely essential for you to leave the hide then please walk well away from the area.
7. Please be aware that the hide is adequately comfortable but is very basic with no other facilities other than those described. We do provide a bucket as a makeshift toilet but the hide is a communal area with little scope for any privacy. Our advice is to go easy on the coffee/tea before entering the hide!
8. Please leave everything as you found it.
9. There is no smoking in the hide.