

BMN Trip Report **UBC Research Forest (April 26, 2008)**

by Mark Johnston

As we had been on our first hike of 2008, we were blessed with favourable weather on our second hike as well: an excursion into the UBC Research Forest. On Saturday, April 26—the temperature soaring to 19 C or higher—eight of us made our way to relatively isolated Goose Lake at the forest’s western boundary and then back again. We travelled for the most part along sparsely-shaded roads, but, given this year’s harsh winter and cool spring, no one seemed to mind—at least at first—the prolonged exposure to the sun’s warming rays.

We hadn’t gone far before stopping at a rocky bluff overlooking the Pitt River lowlands. The morning sun was gaining strength and the air was alive with birdsong. We heard robins and towhees, an orange-crowned warbler too. Just below us, a rufous hummingbird rested atop a young hemlock. Although we had barely gotten started, we lingered a long while, soaking up the sun and straining to identify everything that chirped, flitted, or flew.

Resuming our hike, and halfway to the lake, we approached a major junction (roads G and G40). As we came to the intersection, those of us in the lead flushed a female blue grouse. There was the usual beating of wings as the grouse “flew” from vegetation by the side of the road to protective cover a little farther away.



**Linda photographing blue grouse
(photo by David Mounteney)**

Those of us in front carried on, but a moment later those bringing up the rear called us back. Turning around, we were startled to see a male grouse in full display scurrying toward us. As various members of our group tried to photograph the bird, he became increasingly agitated and aggressive, resorting to charging at us and even trying to peck at our pant legs or, alternatively, strike out with a wing. We snapped our pictures and continued up the road, but not without the excited grouse pursuing us for a considerable distance!

As if seeing the grouse in display wasn't spectacle enough, when we later sat down to rest at the edge of a dry open field, an open-winged hawk swooped low from behind us and perched in a tree in the direction of our gaze. As we watched, the hawk—probably a red-tailed—moved from one perch to another until it was beyond our sight.

After our encounters with the grouse and the hawk, our arrival at the lake (as advertised, we had to do a short “bushwhack” to reach the actual lakeshore) seemed somewhat anticlimactic. While the lake was pleasant enough—and we appreciated that the shoreline's dry and matted grass was both easy to walk on and comfortable to lounge or sit in—there proved to be a paucity of birds. The sun was now overhead and nothing much was moving, not even our group, which occupied itself with eating lunch, some of us given to reverie.

After lunch, we headed back and prepared ourselves for another encounter with the male grouse. He did not disappoint, meeting us “halfway” and goading us until we had moved well beyond his domain.

This time we took the crossroad (G40), the entrance to which was signed “Road Closed.” Someone remarked that the BMN Hikers are as likely to take a road marked “closed” as one that is not, maybe more likely! But our choice was not without price: a steady uphill grade in the heat of the day. As we walked, perspiration beading up on our foreheads, we also entertained the thought that by going this way, we would have to cross Blaney Creek without benefit of a bridge. The latter concern elicited one participant's

“threat” of retribution: “If we can’t cross the creek, I’ll . . . !” But as it turned out, we were able to ford the fast-flowing creek relatively easily, the leaders grateful they would live to guide another hike.

Safely on the opposite bank of Blaney Creek, we left road-walking behind and returned via the Blue and Yellow trails, in a clockwise direction. We were now mostly in the woods, crossing a stream or two along the way. We paused for a few minutes beside a pond (where the Blue and Yellow trails meet Road A10), but otherwise hiked steadily until we reached our cars and a well-earned rest.

It had been a good day, and one we will not forget. While, over the years, we have had many encounters with wildlife, perhaps none has been so dramatic as our encounter with the male grouse. Definitely one for the memory bank!