

Blinds for Viewing Grouse Dances at Valentine National Wildlife Refuge

Observation blinds are set up at Valentine National Wildlife Refuge for viewing the spring mating displays of both the sharp-tailed grouse and prairie chicken. The blinds hold 3 people and are available starting April 1 through mid-May. Visitors need to arrive before sunrise and stay for about 2 hours. After making a reservation, visitors are provided with an information packet that includes a map and directions to the blind. It is a good idea to scout out the blind location the day before so it can be located in the dark. The trail and blind are marked with small solar powered lights to guide the way. Dress warm, bring a flashlight, and wear boots for walking from the parking area to the blind. There is no charge for using the blinds. Reservations can be made by calling the refuge at 402-376-3789 or 376-1889. If you are unable to walk to the blind, refuge staff can direct you to locations where the grouse can be viewed from a car.

Both prairie grouse species put on a good show that is well worth getting up in the early morning to see. Blinds are located right at the edge of the dancing grounds and offer excellent opportunities for observation and photography. Sometimes the grouse even call from the top of the blind! The blinds have chairs and viewing slots.

At first light the male grouse, in groups of 3 to 30, meet at traditional areas called leks. The lek is usually located on a small rise or in an area of short grasses. Each male stakes out and defends their portion of the lek. They dance, call, fan their tails, and inflate colorful air sacks on their necks, purple for the sharp-tail and orange for the prairie chicken. All the effort is to impress the females who arrive in ones or twos and meander among the males in a seemingly unimpressed manner. While the females are on the lek, the displaying of the males intensifies. Their displays are a must see for any prairie enthusiast.