

Ripan/ptarmigan/the grouse - survival expert in the realm of cold and snow

The valley grouse and mountain grouse are well adapted to their lives in the realm of cold and snow. You are always just as surprised to hear the mountain grouse creak and burp from the boulder fields of the mountain slopes. It's good to have a calm attitude when a grouse suddenly flies out of the snow, between the skis.

Suits

Both species of grouse change to winter clothes in the month of October.

Autumn's increasingly shorter daylight and colder weather, influence grouse to moult into a snow-white, warmer, and thicker coat. In May, the change to a spotted summer outfit starts. White feathers have air channels, where colored ones have pigments. The air insulates and makes a white feather warm better than a colored one.

The grouse has feathered feet. The feathers protect against the cold, and increase the foot surface, so that the grouse can walk more easily on top of loose snow. The white winter suit is excellent protection against being discovered on the snow by predators and hunters. It takes a trained eye for grouse hunting in the winter.

Warm in the snow

When it's cold, the grouse sleeps under the snow. The grouse digs with its feet, and seems to sink straight into the loose midwinter snow. Then she digs forward half a meter, and falls asleep. Down there, the grouse is warm and protected. The temperature rises to a few minus degrees in the cave, even though it is thirty degrees cold above the snow. In the morning the grouse flies straight up through the snow. If you only see one drop hole, the grouse is still down there.

Sticky food

In the summers, the grouse eats berries, berry rice, and seeds. In winter, this food is covered by snow, and the grouse have to get by on eating thin birch twigs. They walk on the snow, and snap off small pieces. Sometimes they fly up and sit in the birches and eat. It always looks wobbly and unstable.

A red grouse eats upwards of 25 meters of birch twigs every day. The bark contains nutrition, the wood passes undigested through the grouse. The buds are much more nutritious but also contain poison. It is the birches' way of protecting themselves against animals, and the grouse are forced to avoid the buds.

Birds of prey force the grouse to be agile

The grouse is a lean bird, at the beginning of winter she has stored only 25 grams of fat. The grouse on Svalbard are much fatter, they store 100 to 125 grams of fat. There are no birds of prey, and the grouse can lay on the ground without risk. In Scandinavia, golden eagles and peregrine falcons are constantly on the lookout for the grouse, which must be able to take cover or escape quickly.

Own mill

The grouse has a powerful muscular stomach that crushes the food. When the hard birch twigs rub against each other, the bark is torn. It swallows some grit or small stones to improve grinding. Even birds with few or no stones in the muscle belly seem to do well. In winter, grouse's appendixes becomes longer to be able to digest the tough twig food.