

TURKEY HUNTING

BY DARIN RICHARDSON

It all started several years ago, when I encountered my first wild turkeys. We were on horseback, and about a dozen or so surprised birds erupted around us. Apparently it was also the first time the horses had encountered wild turkeys, and the ride became very interesting, very quickly. The sight of the turkeys in our area definitely had my caught my attention. I had been an avid predator caller for many years, and always enjoyed the art of fooling Mother Nature's best into gun range. Would I finally get a chance to attempt to fool a wild turkey?

I had read several articles in outdoor magazines about turkey hunting but had never had a reason to pursue the turkey, until that horseback ride. I never knew turkeys were in our area. The outdoor magazine articles were my only mentors, as we lived in the country, where broadcast television consisted of five or six channels... on a good day. I checked for advice with other hunters I knew in the area and like me, they had not hunted for turkey so they could offer very little help in my pursuit. It was apparent, if I wanted to hunt turkeys, I was going to need to teach myself.

The best thing that happened for my turkey education that first year was my vacation time, and weekends I had available. I would spend, as much time in the

woods as I could that summer sometimes even carrying a VHS camcorder. I went back to the spot I had seen the turkeys in several times, an on occasion had the opportunity to see and watch a bird or two, I heard the birds more often than I seen them and started to get an idea of what they really sounded like.

I bought a pack of mouth calls soon after that and started practicing. I really had become quite impressed with my "calling" ability until the day some buddies came by, and feeling the urge to impress them, I let out my best string of yelps, cuts and clucks. I could already see the surprise on their faces, and the feeling I had impressed them as well, became very short lived when somebody asked, "What's that supposed to be?" My first thought was that they had never heard a wild turkey before and that I needed an audience with a more discriminating ear, so I took out the camcorder, I had carried into the woods with me. I listened to what little audio I had recorded in the field, and was still not convinced that my calling was too far below par. It was then that I decided I would record myself calling. After playing it back, I was amazed at the difference in how it sounded in my head, when I called, and the sounds on the tape. It was then, that I decided I needed to get some better calls, and maybe some different types of calls.

Over the next few paychecks, I purchased more mouth calls, box calls, slate calls, and strikers; basically anything I could use to make turkey calls with. I practiced every chance I could (mostly when no one else was around, as I had already had my ego bruised once), but my calling ability still wasn't progressing as I fast as I wanted it too. It was then that I met a fellow that had lived in Kentucky,

and had hunted turkeys before. I asked him for some advice on my turkey calling and demonstrated all the calls that I knew on each type of call. Shortly after my calling sequence, he asked me to step outside. "Was it really that bad?" I asked. He responded, "not bad at all, but I need to hear what it sounds like outside". After spending sometime outside, letting him hear the calls, he told me he had heard calls a lot worse, that fooled turkeys. I went back home and did some more recording, both indoors and out. I was amazed in the difference of the sounds the calls made, and how you could "direct" the sounds. I could hear the echoes of the calls, if I were next to a building, differences in sound of the call depending on distance I was from the recorder, and differences in the calls depending on the placement of the recorder. The sounds outside definitely sounded more realistic. In fact, there was now an obvious difference in just the sounds the different pegs made on just one slate call and how or where I held the slate. I took the recorder to the woods that same day, and really heard how I sounded. I set the recorder on top of hills, in valleys, behind bushes and brush, in creek beds, anywhere that a bird might of heard it. I called from these same locations, and soon had a fair idea of the acoustics and what the calls may sound like in particular area. I was ready to hunt turkeys.

I didn't draw a permit that next spring turkey season, but I did get to tag along with another hunter, and acquired a few more calls that he recommended and the advice he offered. I got to hear him call, and more importantly I got to hear hens



and gobblers both respond. The following year I did receive a turkey permit and had everything packed in my vest the night before. I had a hunting plan, and a place to hunt, but only one. It was a small patch of timber maybe six acres surrounded by pastures. I was up well before daylight and headed to the woods, loaded down with turkey gear. When I arrived at the gate, where I was supposed to park, I was devastated, there was already a pickup parked there and I could see the hunters heading to my spot. Here I was all dressed up and nowhere to go... except home. I called the landowner later that morning, to basically find out that he had given several people permission to hunt there. The next morning, I encountered



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