

the same situation, but got to talk to the hunters. They said they had heard gobblers but they weren't working very well, and they stopped hunting the previous morning about 10 a.m. (Illinois turkey season ends at 1p.m. each day). My only chance at a turkey was to be there after the experienced hunters left.

About 10:30 I headed loaded down with every piece of turkey equipment I owned, a turkey vest loaded with decoys, a dozen or more calls of different types and styles, a like number of strikers, scuff pads, chalk, water bottles, a stool and of course my shotgun. After carrying what seemed like 60-lbs. of gear across an open field, box calls screeching with every moment, I arrived at my destination, with the reality through all my preparation, I really wasn't prepared at all.

I called until about 12:30 without any success, not one bird answered the call. I threw every call I had at these birds, and they just didn't care. I left the spot, returning home disappointed. After an hour unpacking gear, rinsing off diaphragm calls, sanding slate calls and pegs, chalking box calls, and repacking everything I was ready for the next day.

The next day was exactly like the first, no birds, and no response, and a little more disappointment. Each day was the same routine. Until the end of the next to the last day of season, now completely disheartened. I didn't unpack, prep anything, clean or rinse anything, I just went home. The last day of season arrives; I head to the same timber, half-heartedly set up and make a couple of calls on a slate. Not expecting anything to be different from the previous days, I begin taking all the calls out of my vest, and prepping each

one. Several minutes go by while I scuff, clean and chalk calls, when a movement catches my attention. It's finally a gobbler, it hasn't made a sound but it's definitely coming my way and is in full strut. Here I am with a lap full of calls, my gun laying beside me, and completely caught off guard. The bird closes to about 25-yards and is putting on quite a show and all I can do is to sit still and watch. Eventually he turns away from me, his fan blocking his vision. I slowly pick up the gun and get into position; he spins around and up comes the head. My first turkey is down. One and a quarter inch spurs, eleven and three quarter inch beard, and weighing in at just over twenty-tree and a half pounds. I got my first turkey with dumb luck, but it was also a major learning experience.

I learned from my first turkey hunt and every hunt that followed to scout of your locations well before season, up until two days before you hunt. Try to roost the birds the night before from a distance if possible, by just listening or using locator calls. Make sure you have alternate locations to hunt and that you have scouted them as well. Make sure that you have a discreet entry route in and out of an area in case you have to move locations during broad daylight. The lighter you travel, the better.

After a few years of experience and taking all the calls I owned hunting, I figured out I seldom used all the calls I had taken. I found myself going to my "closer" calls time after time. I discovered that using one call of each type well is more successful than using many calls poorly.

Do NOT over call, or call too loud, start calling softly and get louder if you have too. I've discovered that a good slate, with different strikers, and produce many different sounds and that the strikers take up a lot less room than slate calls. I found you need to be quiet in moving, and putting a box call or strikers in an olive drab sock makes an excellent way to carry and protect them.

Get a vest with a drop down seat attached; stools can be noisy and hard to switch position in if a gobbler comes in from an unexpected direction. Get a hydration bladder, plastic water bottles flash like a mirror in the morning sun.

Listen to the turkeys vocabulary, then record your calling in a similar area, play it back to see how much different it sounds. Not all birds gobble, some just walk in, be prepared. Get comfortable BEFORE you call, remove all sticks and debris from where you will be sitting.

Make sure your shooting lanes are clear and that you can move your gun from side to side with out obstruction. Know your equipment before you go hunting, including the shot pattern and range.

Put your mouth call in BEFORE you need it, clean them at night with mouth wash then keep them in the



refrigerator during the off season. Humidity changes the sound properties of some box calls, "sweet spots" and chalk can change fairly rapidly just from moving them from dry indoors environments to the moist outdoors. I usually leave my vest with the calls in the cab of the truck a couple of days before and during turkey season.

Clean or scuff your strikers and slate calls before and during calling. Preferably sit with your back against a tree wider that you are, with your

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