

OF THE OUTDOORS:

Preseason Turkey Scouting Worth It

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To be successful at turkey hunting there are several to things that need to come together.

The most important of these is knowing the area the birds are using.

In order to find out this information, it will require preseason scouting as this allows you to have a plan put together ahead of time, so you'll know the who, what, when and where before opening day.

By doing your preseason scouting you'll be able to figure out the bird patterns, where they're roosting, where they're coming out of the roost, their travel routes to and from feeding areas and how they get back to their roost just before dark.

Don't make the mistake that some spring hunters do and use a turkey call while doing your scouting.

Once a bird hears the hen call, he may come running in and catch you out in the open, which is a good way to educate the bird.

When scouting, use a call that makes the Tom gobble, but not come your direction.

You'll want to use a call that will cause the bird to shock gobble as these loud calls startle or shock the bird causing it to gobble.

Good shock calls can be a predator, owl or crow call as these are sounds that the birds have heard before that won't make them come running in your direction.

These calls can be used during preseason scouting and during the regular season.

Locating the tree the birds are using as a roost will be a big help, giving you a place to start on opening morning.

Roost trees are generally some of the tallest trees in the woods. Look for trees with an accumulation of droppings and feathers under them, which is a pretty good indicator that the birds have used the trees as a roost.

If there are fresh droppings, those that are soft and damp it's more than likely an active roost that has seen recent use.

Year in and year out unless harassed or forced out of the area, turkeys will roost in approximately the same location.

As you work your way through the woods, you'll want to be on the lookout for fresh droppings or areas where the birds have been scratching or dusting themselves.

Scratching areas are those where the leaves have been scratched away so the birds can get at the seeds and insects.

These areas will also help you to identify the direction the birds are moving, as the leaves removed from the ground will be piled up in the opposite direction the birds are moving.

Like any other type of hunting, your location is very important as turkeys like us are creatures of habit and once you figure out their routine, you're well on your way to becoming a successful turkey hunter.

Unless disturbed, turkey will travel using about the same routes, traveling and feeding in the same general direction each day.

Now that you've scouted the area and have an idea as to where they're roosting and feeding, you should be able to figure out where their travel routes are and to set for the birds.

By setting up near their roost you should be able to catch them as they fly down or return to the roost as well as setting up along their travel route, as chances are that sometime during the day, the birds will make their way through the area.

Lets look at several set ups that will work for calling turkeys

early as well as later in the day.

Roost Tree Set Up

Once you've located the roost, go back to the area just before dark, using your binoculars, glass the area and look for activity.

Just prior to dark, make a call or two with an owl or crow call and then wait for a response. If there are Toms in the area, they'll shock gobble back at these calls.

To get set up in near a roost tree, you'll want to make sure that you're in the area well before sunrise, and get set up about 100 yards from where the birds are roosting.

If the birds haven't been spooked or hunted hard, using decoys near a roost tree is a good option.

Turkeys have tremendous vision as well as hearing and a decoy that's set off to the side will draw the birds attention away from the hunter, giving you the opportunity to move if needed to take the shot.

Generally I'll use 2 decoys, one a Jake (a young tom) and the other a receptive hen in the ready position, crouched low to the ground.

The Tom will usually head straight for the Jake, hoping to frighten it off or intimidate it and if that doesn't work, he'll do his best to kick the feathers out of the younger bird.

Since I'm right handed and it's easier for me to shoot off to

my left, I place my decoys out in front of me on my left side about 25 yards as this is the range where my shotgun pattern is deadly.

Once set up, I'll get the bird's attention by making a soft yelp, like a hen that's just waking up and as the sun starts to rise, I'll get a little more vocal, trying to get the Tom to look in the direction of my decoys.

Once I've got his attention, I'll do a fly down cackle, the sound the hen makes as she's leaving the tree.

This is usually all it takes to get the birds to start pitching out of the trees.

Hopefully one of the Toms will come out, flying right down to the decoys. When this happens, all you need to do is to get him to strut on in and then give him a warning putt so he'll stick his head out which gives you a good shot at his noggin and his neck.

Unfortunately, this isn't the way it always happens! If the hens all come out at the same time as the Tom, you've got your work cut out for you, as the Tom will hang up.

This means he'll do his strutting around all of his lady friends and not come your way as no Tom in his right mind is going to leave a bunch of hens to go to a single bird.

If this happens, there's only one thing you can do and that's to try and call the boss hen to you.

The boss hen is the loudest one of the bunch and the bird that talks back to you as you call.

What's she's trying to do is to keep the Tom with her and to let that loud mouth hen off in the distance know if she doesn't cool it, she's going to come over and kick some tail.

As you call, she'll get louder, so keep calling louder and unless the Tom takes them a way from you, she'll come over to show you whose boss.

As she heads towards you, the rest of the flock will follow, including the Tom, giving you the opportunity to fill your tag.

This set up works well when hunting at first light as the birds leave the roost and evening hunting when the birds are returning to the roost.

Travel Route Set Up

This is a set up where you get in between the roost tree and the birds feeding area.

You don't need to be in their direct route as you should be able to call the birds off a few yards or so in either direction.

On this set up, you may not need a decoy as the birds are feeding in your direction, what

you will need is to be fully camouflaged and hunkered down next to a tree or concealed in a blind.

When setting out in the open, whether it is against a tree or a bush, you're going to have to be patient and sit still.

There's no need to get too carried away with the calling, as you know the birds are on their way.

A low contented cluck or purr will do the trick. All you need to do is to get a few of the birds to meander your way, which should bring the majority of them within gun or bow range.

As I mentioned before, don't shoot at the Tom when his head is tucked in and he's strutting as there's less of the vital area, his head and neck showing in the strut, so hold your shot until his head is stretched out.

This too is another set up that works as the birds are going out to feed early in the day as well as later in the day as they are making they way back into their roosting area.

The only other method that I use in the spring to call turkeys is a late season tactic called "the run and gun."

The run and gun method is

one where I work the ridge tops, calling from time to time, hoping to get a response.

Once I get a response, I glass the area the gobble came from and once I locate the bird, I try to get out in front of the bird and call him in.

If he has a harem of hens with him and won't leave them, once again, I'll go to work on the boss hen and see if I can I get her to bring the birds my way.

Spring turkey hunting is a great sport; where you need to be concealed well, sit still and have a lot of patience as very seldom does anything happen too quickly during the spring turkey season.

When it does happen, you'll find that all of your pre-season scouting and the time you put in the woods were well worth your effort.

Gary Howey, Hartington, Neb., is a former hunting and fishing guide whose award winning Outdoorsmen Adventures television series can be seen on Saturday at 6:30 am and Sunday at 7:00 am on KTTM/KTTW-TV (Fox) Sioux Falls/Huron, SD For more information on the outdoors check out www.outdoorsmenadventres.com.

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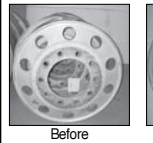
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