

# Wisconsin Turkey Hunter's Guide



Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources  
Wisconsin Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation



# A Turkey Hunter's Code of Conduct

As a  
**Responsible Turkey Hunter,**  
I will

1. not let peer pressure or the excitement of the hunt cloud my judgment;
2. learn and practice safe hunting techniques;
3. hunt the wild turkey fairly;
4. know the capabilities and limitations of my gun or bow and use it safely;
5. obey and support all wildlife laws and report all violations;
6. respect the land and the landowner and always obtain permission before hunting;
7. avoid knowingly interfering with another hunter and respect the right of others to lawfully share the outdoors;
8. value the hunting experience and appreciate the beauty of the wild turkey;
9. positively identify my target as a legal bird and insist on a good shot;
10. share responsible turkey hunting with others and work for wild turkey conservation.



# Wisconsin Turkey Hunter's Guide

This guide is intended to provide Wisconsin turkey hunters with the information necessary to hunt wild turkeys responsibly, safely and successfully. The goal of this brochure is to educate hunters about turkey hunting and persuade them to pursue turkeys in an ethical manner while establishing a tradition for future Wisconsin turkey hunters. One of the best ways to ensure the future of turkey hunting is to get involved in mentoring new hunters. Always consider what else you can do to promote the future of turkey management and hunting in Wisconsin.

Edited by: Eric Lobner

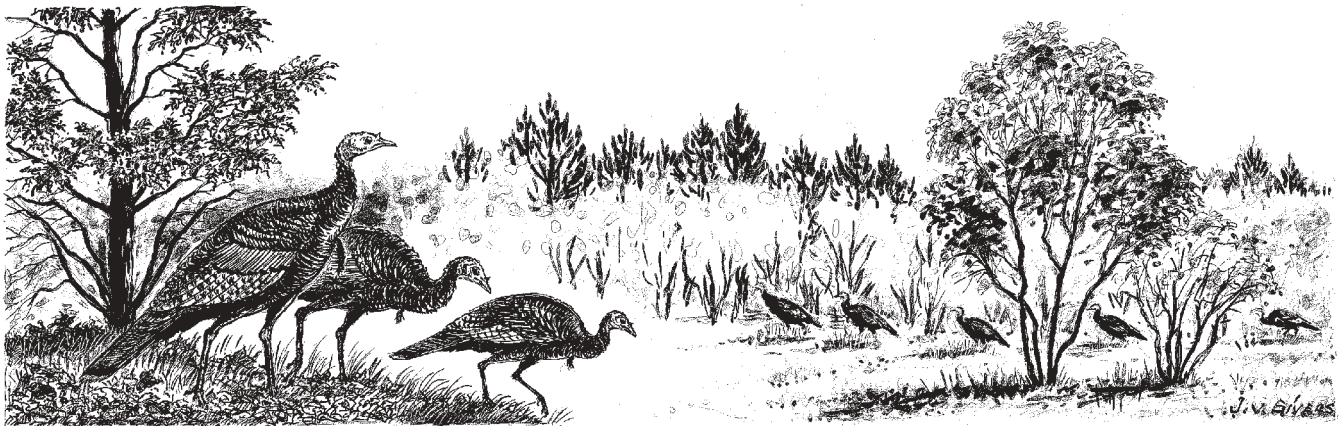
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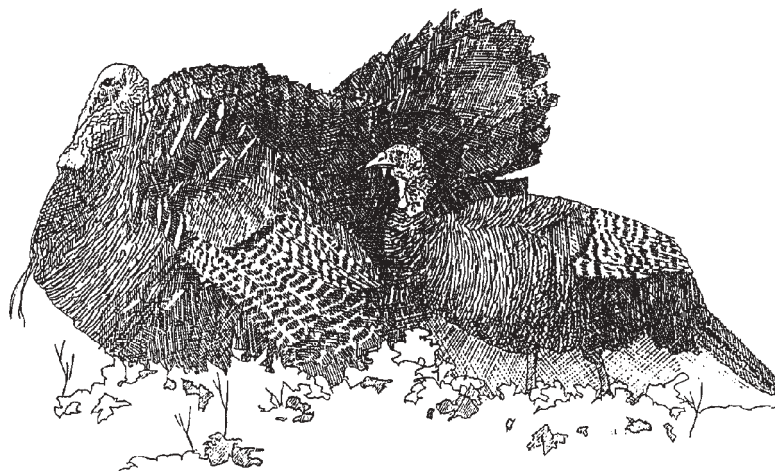
*Cover photo by Al Cornell.*

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## Acknowledgements

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The earlier editions contained information on the turkey restoration program, turkey population expansion, wild turkey biology, and hunting techniques and regulations. This revision to the guide also incorporates an analysis of hunting accidents for the first 16 seasons, additional in-depth hunting techniques, information on scoring trophy birds, additional safety information and some tasty ideas for preparing your bird once you've brought it home.

In addition to the input from all of the original advisors and contributors, this revision was written with input from members of the National Wild Turkey Federation, Department of Natural Resources Bureaus of Wildlife Management, Integrated Science Services, and Law Enforcement, and various educators for Wisconsin's Turkey Hunter Education Program. The combination of all of these people efforts have made this version of the Wisconsin Turkey Hunters Guide the most informative and educational for Wisconsin's turkey hunters.

Special thanks to Scott Beckerman, Al Cornell, Mike Hopiak, Neal Paisley, Roger Raisch, *Turkey and Turkey Hunting Magazine*, Robert Queen, Kevin Wallenfang, and Robert Wright for the use of their photographs and Neal Paisley and Robert Wright for use of their food habits and mortality data. Also thank you to the National Wild Turkey Federation for the hunter safety tips and Code of Conduct used in this publication.

Funding for this publication was provided by Wisconsin hunters through hunting license and stamp fees, the Wisconsin Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation and the sponsors listed at the end of this publication.

Special thanks to all of the dedicated members of the National Wild Turkey Federation and other conservation organizations around the state who have contributed so much to the restoration and management of Wisconsin's wild turkeys and development of a safe and ethical hunting tradition. Enjoy a safe hunting experience!

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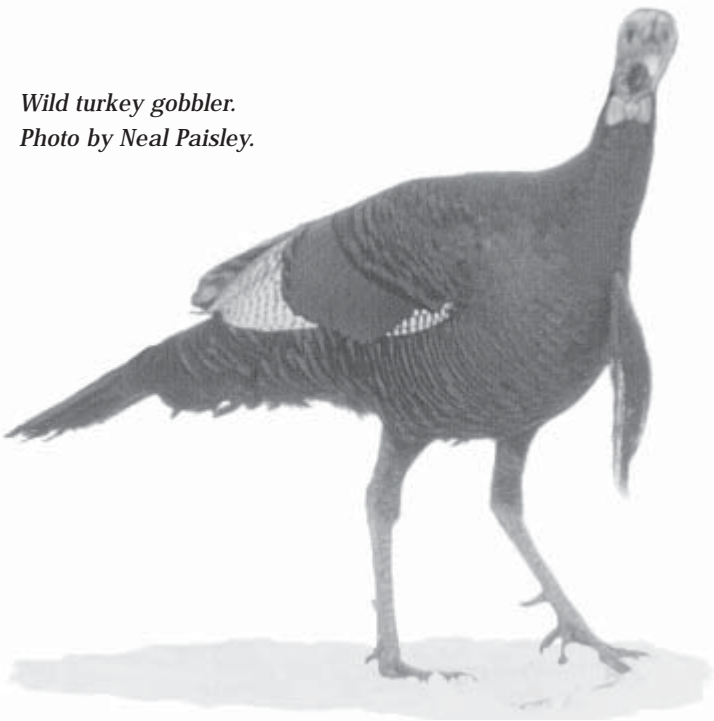
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# Physical description

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Wild turkey gobbler.  
Photo by Neal Paisley.



The eastern wild turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo silvestris*) is a member of the bird order Galliformes that also includes other upland game-birds such as grouse, pheasants, partridge, and quail. The largest game bird in North America, adult male turkeys (gobblers or toms) average about 21 pounds in Wisconsin while adult females (hens) weigh around 12 pounds. (The Wisconsin record holding gobbler weighs over 30 pounds). Juvenile turkeys usually weigh between 5 and 12 pounds in the fall. Plumage color of the body is an iridescent bronze, and wing and tail feathers have alternating light and dark bands. Their heads are mostly featherless.

## Sex and age differences

Adult males and females can be differentiated by feather color, head color, and presence of leg spurs and beards. Gobblers have black-tipped breast feathers while hens have buff-tipped breast feathers. Head color is usually gray-blue for hens and covered with sparse brown feathers while gobblers have shades of red, blue and white. Gobblers also have fleshy head and neck adornments called wattles, caruncles, and a snood. Another variation is that toms have leg spurs and hens do not. Gobblers have a coarse group of bristles, called a beard, hanging from their chest. Hens do not normally have beards, however, in rare cases (less than 5% of the time) hens will have a sparse beard. In the fall, the sex of young turkeys can only be differentiated by examining the breast feathers to see if the male black-tipped feathers are starting to come in.

Wild turkey hen.  
Photo by Jeff Engel.



*Silhouette of tail feathers*

## Sex characteristics

Characteristic	Female (hen)	Male (gobbler)
Breast feathers	Buff-colored tip	Black-colored tip
Beard	Rare	Regularly
Head colors	Gray-brown to gray-blue, feathered farther up neck	Bright blue to bright red; sometimes grayish-white
Head adornments	Occasionally a slight snood	Wattles, snood, caruncles
Spurs	None	Yes
Droppings	Small, coiled	Larger, J-shaped
Track size	4 1/2" spread or less	Greater than 4 1/2" spread
Gobble	Never	Frequently, especially in spring



*Adult*



*Juvenile*

Spur length is a reliable method for aging males. In spring, yearling males, also called jakes, have short spurs less than 12 mm (0.5 inch); spurs on 2 year-olds are 12-24 mm (0.5-1.0 inch) long; and birds 3 years or older usually have spurs over 24 mm (1.0 inch). Radiographs from x-rays of spurs have also been used to determine the proportion of birds in each age group based on the length of the spur-cap apex (internal core of the spur). This information provides a cross check on ages derived from spur lengths. In fall, gobblers have obvious spurs while juvenile males have a very small or inconspicuous spur.

Turkeys can also be aged using feather criteria and leg color. The last two primaries or outer wing feathers in juveniles lack white bars on the last two inches and are sharply pointed. Adult birds have rounded or worn outer primaries with white bars to the tip. In spring, a jake's central tail feathers are longer than the rest of the tail feathers, while all tail feathers of adults are the same length. The leg color of young birds is pale reddish-mahogany or grayish-brown, but pink or grayish-silver in adults.



*Wild turkey breast feathers (top, gobbler; bottom, hen)*

# Hunting regulations

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## Setting regulations

Hunting regulations maximize quality hunting opportunities while preventing the over-harvest of wild turkeys. Regulations are based mostly on biological information together with the desires of turkey hunters. Turkey hunters regularly provide advice to wildlife managers through questionnaires, active involvement with the Wisconsin Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation, the Conservation Congress Turkey Committee, other conservation organizations, and public hearings.

## Spring hunting season

The first spring turkey hunting season opened in 1983. When the first spring turkey season opened, there were three 5-day hunting periods. The number of hunting periods was later expanded to four and then to our current season of six 5-day hunting periods that begin on the Wednesday closest to April 13<sup>th</sup>. The different hunting periods allow for a greater number of hunters to participate without increasing the probability of interference or hunting accidents. The timing of hunting periods was designed to include the peaks in turkey gobbling activity that occur in late April and early May. During the spring season only male or female *bearded* turkeys can be harvested. Harvest prescriptions attempt to remove only 30% to 35% of the gobblers during the spring season to ensure most gobblers survive to the following year. This means enough gobblers will be available to hunt in future years even if reproduction is poor for a year or two.

## Fall hunting season

The first fall turkey hunting season was initiated in 1989. Fall turkey hunting provides valuable hunting opportunities and is the primary season currently used to control turkey population expansion, as hens are legal game during this season. The fall season initially consisted of three, 5-day hunting periods in October. Beginning in 1994, the fall season was changed to consist of a 28-day season. Starting in fall 2005 the fall season was changed to begin on the Saturday nearest to October 10<sup>th</sup> and continue for 40 consecutive days. Fall turkey harvest rates have been decreasing, not due to fewer birds but

rather conflicts with other fall hunting opportunities. Extending the fall season allows hunters greater hunting flexibility and an increased chance at bagging a bird. Since the fall season allows for the harvest of hens, which can have a large impact on the population, the fall season remains more conservative than the spring season.

## Turkey hunting zones

Wisconsin's turkey range has been divided into many hunting zones with new zones added as the turkey population expands into new areas. This zone system that has been developed allows wildlife managers to set permit levels appropriate to each area based on local turkey populations, the amount of turkey habitat, and the square miles of huntable land.

Considerable public land, including state and federal wildlife areas are available throughout the turkey management zones in addition to the spring turkey hunting opportunities in 12 state parks. Of those state parks where turkey permits are available in the spring, limited turkey hunting has proven to be a compatible recreational use of state parks since no problems between turkey hunters and other park users have occurred. Six of these state parks are open exclusively to disabled turkey hunters only, providing additional opportunity for those with reduced mobility.

In addition to the hunting opportunities in the wild turkey management zones, Fort McCoy in Monroe County, also has limited numbers of permits available in the spring and fall. Hunters during the spring season that did not receive approval to hunt turkeys in a State of Wisconsin turkey hunting zone are eligible to apply and are encouraged to call or write no earlier than Feb.

1. Fall applications are available after March 1. Fall hunters may not apply for a Fort McCoy fall turkey permit if they plan to or already have applied for a fall State of Wisconsin turkey hunting zone. Applications for Fort McCoy hunting permits may be obtained by calling (608) 388-3337 or by sending a self-addressed stamped envelope to: Directorate of Training, Mobilization, and Security, AFRC-FM-TMR-RB (Permit Sales), 110 East Headquarters Road, Fort McCoy, WI 54656-5226. Applications may also be obtained from the web site at:

[www.mccoy.army.mil](http://www.mccoy.army.mil).



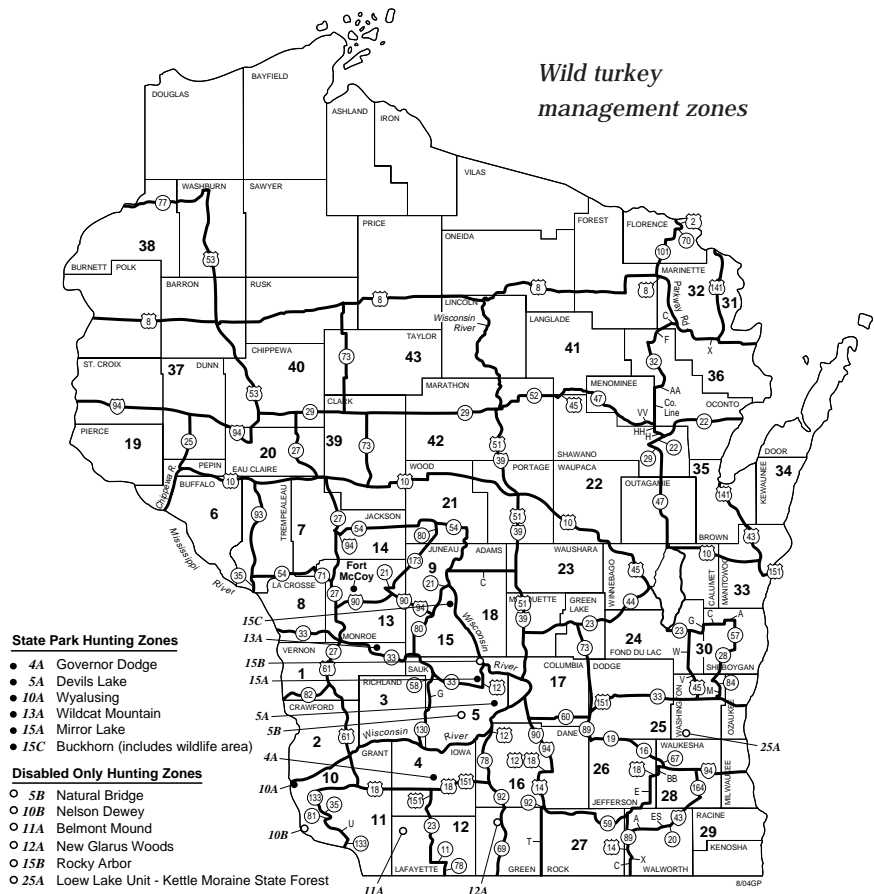
## Permit levels

Wildlife managers set permit levels for each zone to prevent excessive turkey harvests and minimize interference among hunters. Permit levels reflect turkey population densities and distribution in each zone. Generally, zones with more forested habitat have more permits and permit levels are usually higher in zones that have higher turkey densities. For example, zone 4 had 60 turkeys per square mile of timber compared to 4 turkeys per square mile in zone 6 during 1993. Permit levels have ranged from 0.1 to 5 per hunting period per square mile of timber. When setting the permit levels for the turkey management zones, the turkey advisory committee takes into consideration the interference rate that is reported through questionnaires sent to a sample of turkey hunters. Hunter questionnaires show that interference among fall turkey hunters remains relatively low and varies between zones depending on hunters perception and the type of terrain.

Spring permit levels also take into account past hunter success rates and gobbler harvest rates. Permit levels are not usually set above two per period per square mile of timber until the hunter success rate reaches 20%. Permit levels allow for a gobbler harvest rate of 20-30%, ensuring that many gobblers are available in subsequent years even if reproduction is poor.

Fall permit levels maximize hunting opportunities while limiting hen harvest. Research has shown that harvests of more than 7% of the hens causes the population to decline in Wisconsin. Fall harvests should be less than or equal to the total spring harvest for each zone.

Wisconsin's turkey hunting safety record is a relatively good one. Reasons for this record likely include limitation of the number of permits to reduce the chance of interference and accidents along with the turkey hunter education clinics that are offered through the WDNR and NWTF. Although some increase in the number of accidents has occurred in the past several years, a continued focus on safety through the clinics should help keep accidents at low levels.



## Permit issuance

Turkey hunters must apply for a permit to hunt turkeys. Application deadlines, December 10<sup>th</sup> for the spring season and August 10<sup>th</sup> for the fall, are set early to allow time to process applications, issue permits, and in the case of the spring hunt, inform hunters of the times and locations of turkey hunter education clinics. Applicants select the zones and hunting periods that they would be interested in hunting.

Landowners have first preference for 30% of the permits in each zone. Residents that did not receive a permit the previous year, have the next highest preference rating followed by other residents. Non-residents have the lowest preference rating. Applicants in each preference category are randomly selected until all either receive a permit or all of the remaining applicants' choices for zones and hunting periods no longer have permits left.

There is an attempt to issue a permit to all applicants, but those who restrict their choices to only a few zones or select only the early hunting periods, may receive no permit while others who would accept permits for any time period, receive two. If permits remain after the first drawing, a second drawing is conducted to issue second tags. All options of all applicants are evaluated to issue a permit to as many applicants as possible before any second permits are issued. Not all zones have extra tags and all second tags are issued for the last few hunting periods.

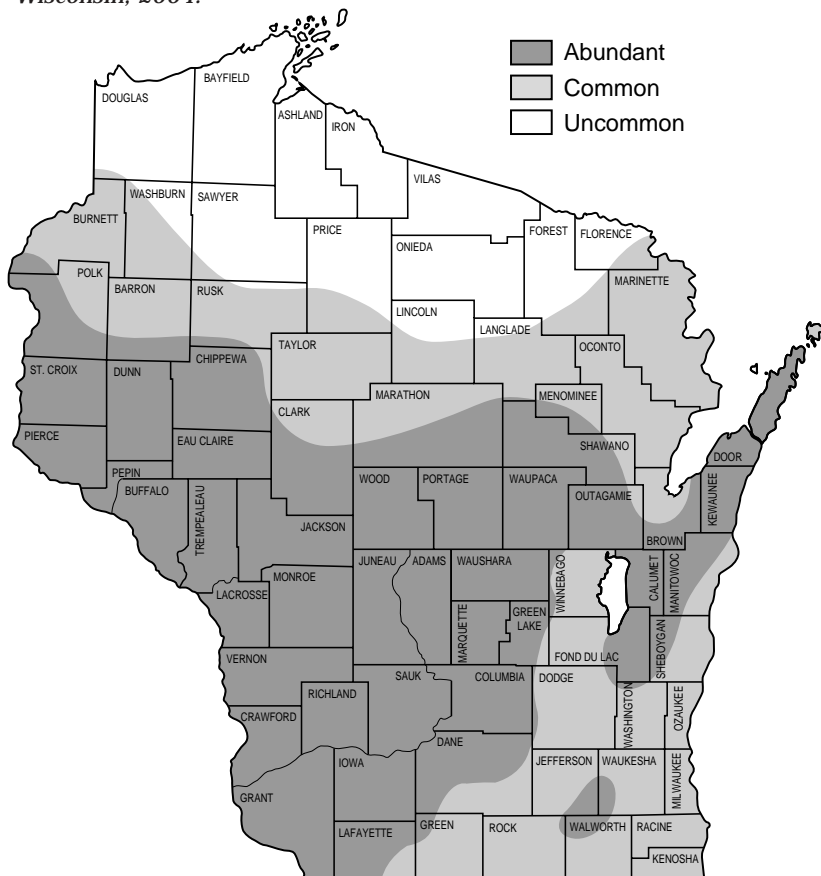
# Natural History

## Current distribution

The eastern wild turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo silvestris*) is the most widely distributed, abundant and hunted turkey of the five subspecies of the North American Wild Turkey. It occurs throughout the eastern half of the United States, and has been successfully transplanted to states outside of its original range including: California, Idaho, and Washington.

The eastern wild turkey was historically abundant in central and southern Wisconsin, and provided an important food source for Native Americans and early settlers. Following completion of a successful restoration program, turkeys are now commonly found throughout the southern two-thirds of Wisconsin. Sparse populations of turkeys can be found throughout the northern portion of the state in areas where agriculture and mixed woodlands occur.

Range of wild turkey in Wisconsin, 2004.



## Habitat needs

The habitat needs of the wild turkey include roosting and nesting cover, brood-rearing habitat, and dependable food sources. Roosting habitat includes large trees with horizontal limbs such as open-grown oaks and mature evergreens. Nesting cover often includes brush or downed tree limbs on the forest edge. Turkey broods use fields and pastures that have large numbers of insects which are an important protein source for the poults (young turkeys). Other important foods include the hard and soft mast of trees and shrubs as well as waste grains from crop fields. South-facing slopes, which typically have less snow or are snow-free, have available sources of food when other areas are still covered with snow.

In Wisconsin, turkeys do best where the topography is rugged and mature oak/hickory woodlands are interspersed with a variety of agricultural fields. In Vernon County, DNR biologists found that from spring through fall, turkeys spend most of their time in woodlands (62%), followed by crop fields (23%), and pastures and idle areas (15%). Turkeys tend to prefer woodland/field edges.

## Home range and movements

Home range is the area that an animal occupies during the year. The wild turkey's home range size varies greatly among individuals. In Missouri, the home range size for hens averaged nearly 2000 acres, ranging from 900-5800 acres. Estimates for gobblers in Wisconsin were higher, averaging 2500 acres with a range of 1200-6500 acres.

Studies in Vernon County found that significant movements are made by wild turkeys during spring dispersal, particularly yearling hens. While most dispersal movements range from 1-3 miles, yearling hens occasionally move 8-10 miles from their winter ranges. One radio-marked yearling hen moved over 40 miles!

Deep persistent snow cover and extended periods of cold temperatures greatly restrict

turkey movement, occasionally resulting in starvation. Under these conditions, turkeys will roost as close as possible to food sources to conserve energy.

## Breeding and nesting biology

The breeding season for wild turkeys occurs during spring when increasing day length triggers breeding behavior (gobbling and strutting) in males. In Wisconsin, this behavior begins in early March and intensifies until mid-April when hens become receptive to mating following dispersal of large winter flocks. Dominant gobblers do most of the breeding and may breed with many hens, but it is unclear how often individual hens visit gobblers.

Roosting gobblers usually gobble in their roost trees before first light. Shortly after sunrise, turkeys fly down and gobblers begin strutting to attract receptive hens. Later in the spring, as more and more hens begin to incubate their eggs, gobblers are more likely to be found alone or in pairs or trios. These lone gobblers will often visit areas called strutting zones that attract hens.

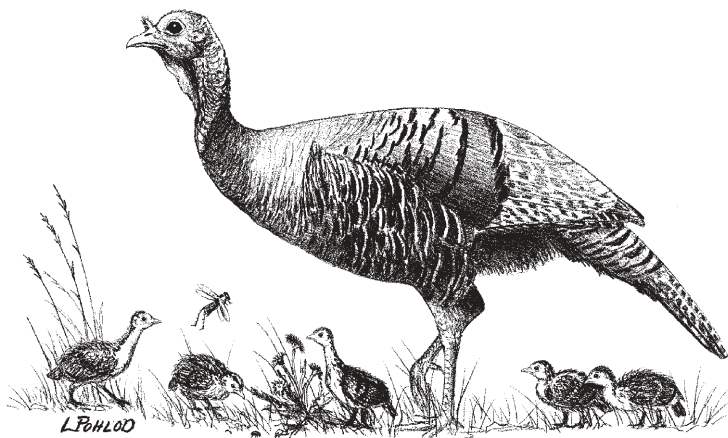
Most hens select a woodland nest site near a field edge. The nest is a simple depression in the leaf litter and is usually against the base of a tree or some other vertical structure. Hens will also nest in hayfields and fallow areas.

Clutch size varies, averaging 11 eggs, and requires about 2 weeks to complete. After all eggs are laid, incubation begins and continues for 28 days with the hen leaving the nest only for a short break each day. Studies in Vernon County indicate that most hens attempt to nest, but only 20% hatch a brood. Predators cause most nest losses, but hay mowing and logging also affect nesting hens. Hens disrupted during laying or early incubation often re-nest, but only one brood is produced each year.

Poults, grow rapidly and can fly short distances within 10 days, but they roost on the ground with the hen until they are about 2 weeks old. During this period, poults are especially vulnerable to predation and other mortality factors and only about 50% survive.



*Above: Beginning in early March, dominant toms begin displaying strutting activity in an attempt to attract attentive hens for mating. Photo by Al Cornell. Left: Nesting on the ground, hens typically select a nest site that is close to some type of ground cover. Photo by Mike Hopiak for Cornell Lab of Ornithology.*





## Survival and causes of mortality

Annual survival for both hens and gobblers averages about 50%. Hen mortality is highest during nesting and early brood-rearing (late April-early July). Predators are responsible for 75% of all hen deaths. Fall hunting, where allowed, accounts for less than 10% of hen deaths.

Gobbler mortality is highest during the spring hunt. In turkey management zones with relatively high hunter densities, up to one-third of the gobblers are harvested. This legal harvest accounts for two-thirds of annual gobbler mortality.

During mild to normal winters, turkey survival is high. However, prolonged periods of deep snow and sub-zero temperatures

can cause significant mortality. Survival is likely lower in central and northern Wisconsin where winters are more severe and agricultural food sources are limited.

## Food habits

Wild turkeys are opportunists, consuming a wide variety of food items. The bulk of their diet consists of plant material, although animal matter is seasonally important. Research in southwestern Wisconsin indicates that wild turkeys consume about equal proportions of agricultural crops and wild foods during the growing season.

During spring, wild turkeys foraging in agricultural fields concentrate on waste corn, dandelion flowers, alfalfa, and oat seed. Other items used during spring include acorns, grasses, earthworms, and snails.

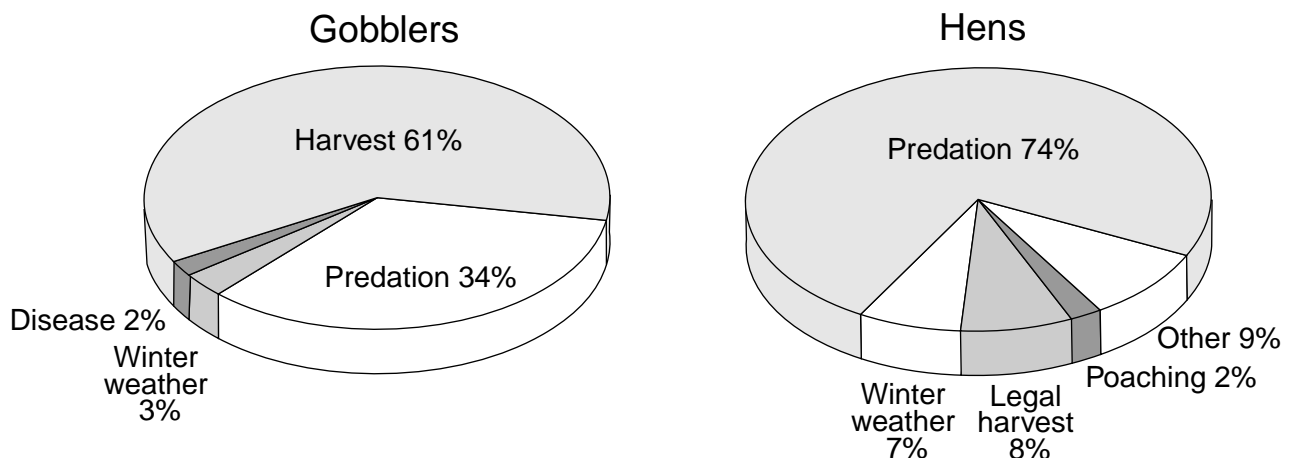
Turkeys, particularly brood flocks, take advantage of insect abundance during summer by foraging in field habitats. Grasshoppers constitute most of the diet for poults. Adults utilize insects, but plant material such as small grains, acorns, and wild fruits are more important. Corn, acorns, hickory nuts, gray dogwood fruit, wild grapes, foxtail seed, and grasshoppers are the most important fall foods.

Agricultural food, including manure, unharvested corn, and waste grain, provide a critical component to winter survival of wild turkeys, particularly in years of poor acorn production. Occasionally turkeys will also eat buds like ruffed grouse.



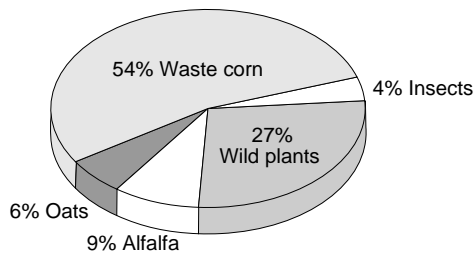
*Many species of wildlife prey on both adult and juvenile wild turkeys, including coyotes. DNR photo.*

*Causes of mortality for wild turkeys in Vernon County, Wisconsin. Chart data from Neal Paisley and Robert Wright.*

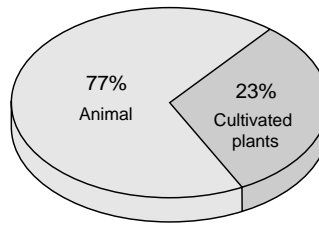




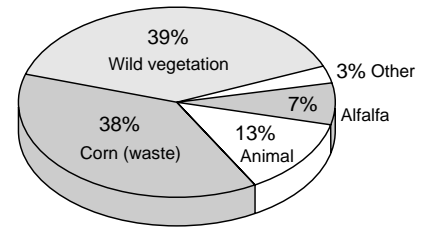
*Spring foods of turkeys feeding in cropland.*



*Foods of turkey poults feeding in cropland during summer.*



*Foods of turkey shot by hunters in fall*



*Chart data from Neal Paisley and Robert Wright.*

## Turkeys and agriculture

A 1987 survey of landowner attitudes toward wild turkeys in southwestern Wisconsin was conducted by the University of Wisconsin-Extension. Forty-five percent of survey respondents claimed to have experienced some damage, but more than half described losses as insignificant or minor. These landowners' concerns about possible crop damage prompted field studies of the wild turkey's impact on agriculture.

During the late 1980's and early 1990's Wisconsin DNR researchers investigated habitat and food preferences of wild turkeys in agricultural areas of southwest Wisconsin. To assess habitat use, turkeys were captured, fitted with radio transmitters, released and monitored. It was discovered that hens spent 61% of their day in forested areas, compared to 24% in crop fields and 15% in non-crop fields. During summer, hens with poults increased their use of crop fields relative to hens without poults. Gobblers spent less time in crop fields than hens did throughout summer and fall.

To provide a better picture of the wild turkey's diet, researchers collected birds actually foraging in agricultural crop fields (the worst case scenario) to examine their gut contents. Hunter-shot turkeys were also examined. Turkeys were found to have eaten a wide range of foods from both the woodlands and croplands. They were not always feeding on what you would expect them to in the crop fields. Agricultural crops were an important part of the diet of adult turkeys, but most were in the form of waste grain. Waste grain could be identified by its

weathered and dirty appearance, teeth marks from other animals, or smell of manure. Turkeys also fed on weed seeds and weed parts such as dandelion heads. Hen turkeys were actually doing farmers a favor by taking their poults into agriculture fields to consume large quantities of insects.

Wildlife managers and the U.S. Department of Agriculture-Wildlife Services also solicited complaints of wild turkey crop damage to assess the potential for turkey-related problems. Of 28 complaints investigated by these experts, only 5 (18%) were confirmed as crop damage by wild turkeys. In contrast, deer were the cause of damage in 55% of the cases, and raccoons in 25%. Their large size, day-time activity pattern, and flocking behavior make turkeys easy to observe in croplands. As a result, turkeys have often been blamed mistakenly for crop damage. While turkeys may have caused minor crop damage in isolated instances, it appears that they were often accused for damage caused by other animals or by the weather.

*Although hens and poults frequent agricultural fields, little crop damage is done while they search for insects. Photo by Scott Beckerman.*



# Wild turkey management

## Restoration

### History and demise of the native wild turkey in Wisconsin

Wild turkeys have been a part of Wisconsin history dating back to as early as 1670 when turkeys were recorded around the Lake Winnebago area by the Jesuit, Allouez. Throughout history, turkeys were quite abundant south of a line from Green Bay to Prairie du Chien, with some fluctuation during years of severe winters and low natural food production. With the highest densities occurring in southwestern Wisconsin, it was not uncommon to see members of the Fox Indian tribes in Prairie du Chien around 1816 with sleds loaded with as many as thirty turkeys for sale. During the 1830's flocks numbering from 10 to 40 birds were seen frequently in timber along the Grant River and in 1856, wild turkeys sold for 25 cents apiece in Lancaster.

By 1860, wild turkeys were rare throughout Wisconsin, with the last sightings occurring during the late 1800's. The extirpation of turkeys in Wisconsin was probably caused by extensive harvesting of forests, unregulated turkey hunting, and diseases introduced with domestic poultry.

Almost immediately following their demise, Wisconsin residents realized they had lost a unique upland game bird. The first attempt to reintroduce turkeys occurred in 1887 when a private individual released two pairs of wild turkeys near Lake Koshkonong. This flock flourished during the late 1890's with their numbers reaching as many as 200 birds, but soon perished in the early 1900's.

*Wild turkeys were captured using large rocket nets and transported to areas with lower population numbers to help the birds expand around the state. Photo by Al Cornell.*



Between 1929 and 1939, the State of Wisconsin released about 3,000 pen-reared turkeys in Grant and Sauk Counties. The birds frequented farms and were not wary of predators or hunters. A remnant of this population persisted for many years but in February, 1958, the last bird was reported dead near Grand Marsh in Adams County.

### Meadow Valley-Necedah restoration project

In the early 1950's the Conservation Department, our current day DNR, again stocked turkeys in Wisconsin. Interest grew when a game breeder in Pennsylvania announced he had developed an "improved" strain of turkey, a cross between domestic pen-reared hens and wild free-ranging males. Between 1954-57, approximately 827 birds of Pennsylvania origin were released on the Meadow Valley Wildlife Area-Necedah National Wildlife Refuge (MVWA-NNWR) in Monroe and Juneau Counties. Following an initial population expansion, their numbers decreased dramatically due to disease, severe winters, and poor mast crops.

The first hunting season for the MVWA-NNWR population occurred in 1966 and continued for 3 consecutive seasons, following a slight increase in the population. Throughout all four seasons, a total of only 59 turkeys were harvested, which accounted for a hunter success rate of less than 1% for the 7,500 permit holders.

### Wisconsin's wild turkey trap and transplant program

Following these unsuccessful attempts at reintroduction of game farm birds, new hope for turkey restoration arose in the 1950's when the first attempts at translocation of wild-trapped, free ranging-turkeys occurred in other parts of the country. The WDNR entered into a trade agreement with the Missouri Department of Conservation in 1974. In return for 135 Coulee Region ruffed grouse, the first shipment of turkeys from Missouri were released in the Bad Axe watershed in Vernon County in January 1976.

As a result of this agreement, a total of 334 Missouri turkeys were released in Buffalo, Iowa, Sauk, Trempealeau, Jackson, La Crosse, Vernon, Dane and Lafayette Counties. These areas were chosen because of the ideal turkey habitat that was present through the mature hardwood forests, spring seeps, south-facing slopes and agricultural land use patterns that were common throughout this region.

These birds were well adapted to the rigors of the wild, flourished throughout the region and provided a source for Wisconsin's own trap and transplant program which began only three years later in 1979. Following the stocking of the prime turkey habitat in southwestern Wisconsin, wildlife managers expanded their efforts throughout eastern and central Wisconsin, which was thought was marginal habitat at the time. These areas had less woodland, fewer mast trees, flat topography and/or deep persistent snow. Since these reintroduction's, turkeys have proven that they are substantially hardier than originally thought and continue to thrive and expand into additional habitat in northern Wisconsin.

Throughout the trap and transplant program, hunting license fees and taxes through the Pittman-Robertson program provided the necessary funding. As the program progressed, the National Wild Turkey Federation's (NWTF) "Target 2000" program provided additional funding by coordinating restoration programs in other states and reimbursing Wisconsin \$500 per turkey shipped out of state. About 1400 Wisconsin turkeys were shipped to other states for their restoration programs in the same way that Wisconsin benefited from Missouri turkeys. This revenue completely covered the expenses of the trap and transplant program from 1990-1993.

Following the completion of this phase of the program, turkeys have expanded into habitat that was thought to be marginal. In an effort to have turkeys distributed throughout all suitable range and to experiment with the northern limits of range expansion, additional trap and transplant programs were developed in the fall of 1998. In winters 1998-99 and 1999-00, 294 additional turkeys were released at 13 sites in 6 counties along the northern fringe



*Once captured, the turkeys were tagged, boxed, and transported to suitable habitat areas around the state. Photo courtesy of Kevin Wallenfang.*

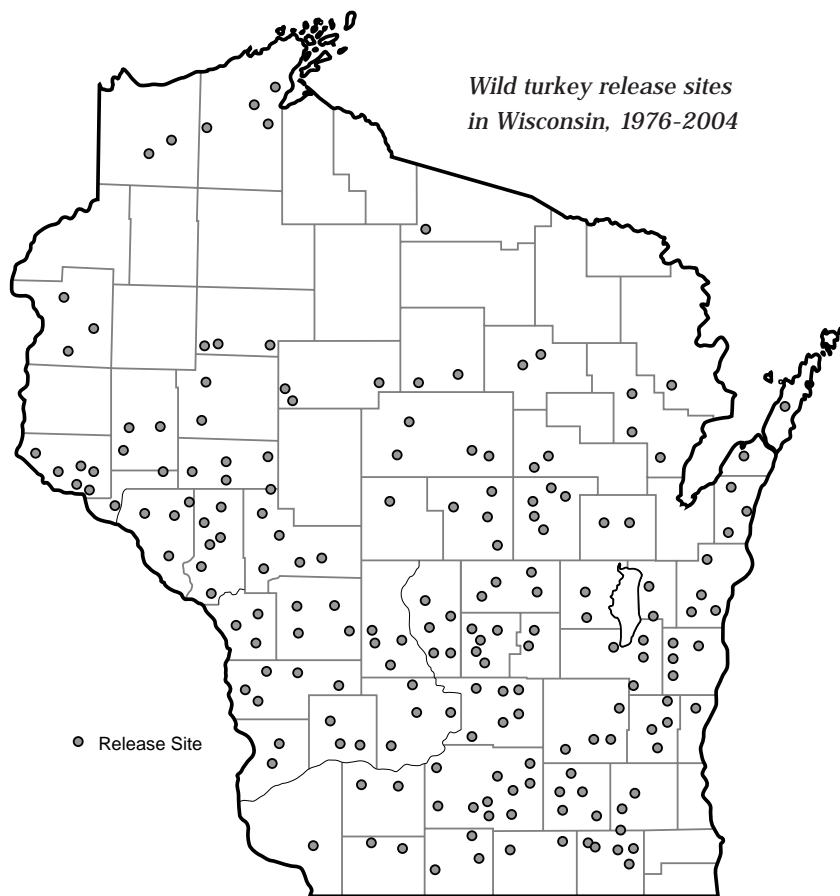
of turkey range. Additionally, during the winter of 2003-04, 164 birds were released onto 6 release sites in Bayfield and Ashland Counties. To date 3,843 turkeys have been stocked at 183 sites in 54 counties. These northern populations of turkeys will be closely monitored and evaluated without additional translocations planned. Depending on the survival and reproductive success of these newly expanded birds, additional hunting opportunities may develop as far north as Douglas and Bayfield Counties.

In addition to the efforts of the WDNR and Wisconsin based conservation organizations efforts such as the NWTF, Wisconsin has benefited from wild turkey releases in adjacent states as well. Turkey populations have become established in Polk, Burnett, Marinette, Oconto, Florence, and Grant counties from turkeys released in Minnesota, Michigan, and Iowa.



*At the release sites, the turkeys quickly took to their new surroundings. DNR photo.*





### **Private stocking-its effects on our wild population**

Many well-meaning citizens have put Wisconsin's wild turkey populations at risk. They have stocked game farm turkeys on their own hoping to speed up turkey restoration in their area. Stocking of pen-reared turkeys, tried many times across the country, has never been effective. More importantly, this stocking activity is illegal—and for good reason. These birds are considered genetically inferior and could contaminate

*Frequently dependent on humans, pen-reared turkeys may be able to survive for a few years but typically are unable to survive for the long-term.  
Photo by Eric Lobner.*



the gene pool of native wild turkeys that are better adapted to the rigors of the wild. In addition, pen-reared turkeys have a higher incidence of disease and may transmit these diseases to healthy wild birds.

Although some of these birds may make it through winter and breed with wild stain birds, the adults lack a natural fear of humans or other predators, and become easy targets. Temporarily, a population of birds may exist, but in the long run, the turkey population will suffer. Another disadvantage that game farm turkeys pose is their dependence on humans. When a harsh winter occurs and there is poor natural food production, the birds lack the ability to find suitable foods, and become increasingly dependent on humans. Concentrating the birds at artificial feeding sites makes the birds more susceptible to disease and predation.

## **Poaching and law enforcement**

Wild turkeys are subjected to many forms of natural mortality. Poaching is one cause of mortality we can curb. This includes hens killed during a gobbler season; turkeys baited, trapped, or killed outside the open season; and exceeded bag limits during the open season. Poaching leaves less turkeys for all Wisconsin residents, including wildlife watchers and legitimate, ethical hunters.

The Wisconsin Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation offers rewards for information concerning turkey poachers. It is the obligation of every turkey hunter to report poaching. Violations should be reported by calling 1-800-847-9367(1-800-TIP-WDNR). Callers may remain anonymous.

## **Habitat management**

Wisconsin wildlife managers frequently meet with private landowners and advise them to maintain or improve habitat for turkeys. Part of this effort includes development, review and modification of recommendations on forest management plans to favor oaks and various forage plants important to turkeys. Landowners are also encouraged to implement practices that are funded by federal Stewardship Incentive Programs that benefit turkeys and other



wildlife species. Participating in federal and state habitat improvement programs frequently helps offset some of the cost involved in the habitat management practices necessary to maintain and improve the habitat conditions.

Maintaining the proper habitat is the main ingredient necessary to attract and maintain a healthy turkey population. Loss of existing oak forests to other less desirable tree species remains the principle long-term concern. Most of the oak resources are owned by private landowners who may not necessarily understand what habitat management strategies are required to maintain this critical habitat type. Landowners need to be better informed on how to implement cutting prescriptions that insure adequate oak regeneration, while optimizing acorn yields. Loss or deterioration of oak forests has been caused, in part, by poorly conceived logging practices including high-grading (taking only the best trees). This practice favors shade-tolerant or less desirable trees, and may not allow oak regeneration to take place. Oak has also been threatened by diseases (oak wilt), insects, and other factors.

Oak regenerate naturally from acorns or stump sprouts, but need full sunlight to survive. Management strategies that favor oaks and wild turkeys should be designed to: 1) Avoid extensive conversion of oaks to other hardwoods or conifers; 2) Retain at least 25% of an oak forest in mature trees with a 12 inch or larger diameter, or 60-75 years of age or older; 3) Retain older mature oaks with good mast-producing capacity as uncut patches or blocks that comprise at least 10% of a clear-cut; 4) Strive to maximize the interspersions of various age classes of oaks (0-25, 26-50, 51-75, and 75+ year-old stands) in nearly equal proportions throughout a management area; 5) Consider tree quality (genetics, size, age, and diameter) in designating trees to be left standing to maximize acorn yields; 6) Plant acorns, seedlings, or saplings to achieve a stocking of 50-200 seedlings/saplings (at least 5 feet tall) per acre. Action should be taken to protect the trees from rodents and other wildlife to ensure that they reach maturity; and 7) Noncommercial trees should be selectively removed or prescribed burns could be applied to encourage oak by reducing

competition for growing space from undesirable woody vegetation. These practices will also promote desirable understory and ground-layer plants. Consult with your local forester or wildlife manager to determine the appropriate cutting prescription in your area.



Other habitat management considerations that favor wild turkeys include: 1) Leave or plant food patches of corn, oats, sorghum, soybean, peas, or other legumes and grasses, particularly where natural forage, crop residues, or spread manure are inadequate in winter. Cost-sharing and/or technical assistance is often available for farmers and other landowners through National Wild Turkey Federation and federal incentive programs; 2) Avoid wholesale conversion of deciduous woodlands, old fields, pasture-fallow, brushy openings, or Conservation Reserve Program lands to conifers or development for extensive commercial or industrial purposes; 3) Discontinue grazing of woodlands by domestic stock; 4) Encourage fall and winter forage production by planting fruit-producing shrubs in small clumps or strips including wild grape, sumac, dogwood, viburnum, highbush cranberry, and hazel; 5) Encourage desirable species, enhance habitat diversity, and provide another source of forage by planting trees such as oak, hickory, cherry, crabapple, wild plum, and beech. If conifers are planted, red and white pine, red and white cedar, and spruce should be arranged in small clumps or strips.

*Proper habitat management and improvement, such as restoring oak woodlands, is vital to the future of the wild turkey program. DNR photo.*



*Although typically not necessary for turkeys, if you decide to plant food plots, plant them close to thermal cover to decrease the amount of travel necessary in winter. DNR photo.*

Additional information on managing property for turkeys can be found in the WDNR publication entitled, "Managing your Land for Wild Turkeys" which is available at your local DNR offices. In addition to this guide, potential sources of information and funding include local DNR wildlife managers and foresters, the National Wild Turkey Federation, Farm Services Agency (FSA), University Extension, and the Wisconsin Woodland Owners Association.

## Survey techniques

A primary objective of Wisconsin's turkey management program is to maintain a secure population capable of supporting a high quality, safe hunt with reasonable hunting success. In addition to turkey population dynamics, managers also need to understand the attitudes and perceptions of

*Some turkeys have been fitted with radio transmitters so researchers can determine habitat needs, causes of mortality, and effects of hunting. Photo by Neal Paisley.*



hunters and of the landowners who provide much of the turkey habitat. Wildlife managers use a number of surveys to monitor the state's turkey populations along with several surveys of hunters and farmers. Past surveys have included spring gobbling surveys, winter flock counts, observations by area residents, deer hunter turkey observation survey, and helicopter surveys. Managers have used this information to develop the harvest management framework, establishing conservative harvests to ensure the future of the turkey resource.

### Current surveys include:

1. Mandatory harvest registration- Turkey hunters in Wisconsin are required to register their harvest. Information is collected on each bird harvested including zone of harvest, date of kill, age, and sex of the bird. This information helps in determining the hunter success rate, proportion of males to females, and proportion of adults to juveniles. Trends in the harvest per permit issued provides a useful measure of changes in turkey abundance.
2. Landowner brood survey- Each year cooperating landowners report the number of turkey broods, poults/brood, and adult hens with or without a brood seen during June-August. This provides a useful index to changes in hen nesting success and brood survival.
3. Ten-week brood survey- Each year DNR personnel report the number of turkey broods and brood sizes they observe between June and August. This survey provides another index to reproductive success.
4. Sociological aspects of turkey hunters- After each spring and fall hunting season a select number of turkey hunters are mailed a survey regarding perception of hunting quality and satisfaction. Hunter results showed that 10% of hunters in spring and fall of 2003 felt that other hunters had kept them from hunting where they wanted. However, only 3% of fall hunters and 6% of spring hunters indicated that other hunters definitely interfered with their hunt. Quality of the hunt was rated as high or very high according to 45% of fall hunters and 41% of spring hunters.



*Helicopter surveys allowed researchers to analyze turkey population numbers and survival rates during the first few years following initial reintroduction. DNR photo*

# Hunter-landowner relations

The future of turkey hunting depends on relations between landowners and hunters. Most turkey habitat is found on private lands. Urbanization has left increasingly more hunters without direct family ties to the land. To landowners, the opening day of hunting on their farms may mean another season of seemingly inconsiderate individuals who come to reap the harvest but are seldom heard from during the remainder of the year.

Without considerate, proper behavior from hunters wishing to use private land, the landowner may increasingly exercise his or her right to prohibit access to all hunters. The solution to this potential problem is the development and acceptance of a hunter's outdoor ethic, here defined as behavior leading toward a harmonious balance between those who use the land for recreation and those who depend upon it for a livelihood.

## Role of landowner and citizen attitude

In Wisconsin, wildlife is legally the property of all citizens, held in trust for them by the State. Game becomes the property of an individual only when it is bagged legally. Public ownership of game has led to a very strong hunting tradition in Wisconsin and across the United States. Because of this, most hunters have grown up with the belief that hunting is a right instead of a privilege. Today, hunting is a sport enjoyed by many regardless of whether they own property.



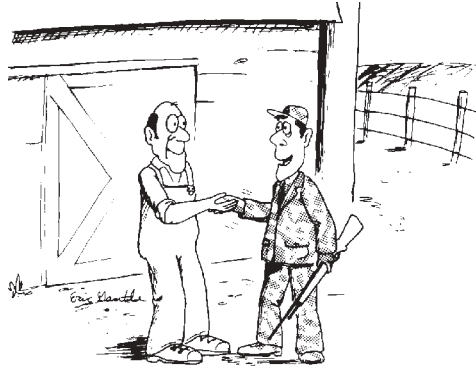
*The future of turkey hunting depends on access to private lands. Be sure to respect the landowners rights and ask permission.*



Many landowners are willing to allow hunters to use their land as long as they ask permission to do so. Unfortunately, a portion of hunters never seek permission and it is those who give all hunters a bad name.

In Wisconsin only 14% of the total land area is in public ownership and about 86% is privately owned. The future of hunting in Wisconsin is dependent on the willingness of private landowners to allow hunting on their property. Steps must be taken now to insure hunting privileges for future generations.

*Ask the landowner for permission to hunt on their property and then thank them for this privilege.*



One way turkey hunters can say “thanks” to landowners is by inviting them to a Landowner Appreciation Day, which is sponsored by the Wisconsin Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation. This event is held at several locations across southern Wisconsin in the month of June in an effort to maintain good landowner-hunter relations. This is the only event of its kind in the United States, and it gives landowners, turkey hunters, and DNR representatives the opportunity to get to know one another. An envelope is included in the DNR mailing to successful applicants for the spring hunt. Hunters are encouraged to return this envelope to the Wisconsin Wild Turkey Federation with a small fee to buy a landowner pass. This pass can be given to a landowner who allowed access to the hunter and entitles the landowner’s family to a free lunch and a chance at raffle prizes.

The Landowner Appreciation Day is just one example. Consider what you can do to express your thanks to a landowner for granting you permission to hunt on his/her property.

## Hunter responsibility

Hunter responsibility involves respect for wildlife, respect for the rights of others and

concern for the use of the land. Hunting in a responsible manner starts before the hunt when permission is obtained, during the hunt when game is pursued in an ethical and legal manner, and after the hunt when the landowner is thanked for the hunting privilege.

## Landowner responsibility

Landowners share many of the same responsibilities as the hunters but their actions have a greater impact on the resource than those of the hunter. Landowners determine the land use pattern and intensity. In Wisconsin’s turkey range, farming is the major livelihood of most landowners. Economic conditions have forced many farmers to become more efficient, sometimes with larger operations, and increased specialization. From a standpoint of sheer economics, many farmers feel they cannot add the price of public recreation to their operating costs, however desirable recreation may be. Those farmers who do manage for wildlife do it because of a sense of stewardship—perhaps their own outdoor ethic. It is in the best interest of all hunters and others to provide incentives for private landowners to benefit wildlife. This could provide suitable habitat for all game species and insure outdoor recreation for landowners, the public, and future generations.

In Wisconsin, 30% of turkey permits are set aside for qualified landowners. Those landowners who receive a landowner preference permit are asked to allow other hunters to hunt on their property, if they ask permission. While this is just one kind of incentive, both hunters and landowners have a common stake in making it work.

## Landowner liability

Landowners who allow hunters on their property should advise them of any dangerous situations or structures that may exist. However, Wisconsin law states that landowners who permit others to hunt, fish, trap or engage in any other specified recreational activities on their land are not liable for injuries to those persons unless they receive at least \$2000 in fees for recreational use.



# Turkey hunter safety

Surprisingly, most hunters involved in hunting accidents have a good number of years of experience. When interviewed, they cannot believe it happened to them. It can happen to you. By being sure of your target and using the defensive measures outlined below, you can help ensure that you have a safe, quality hunt.

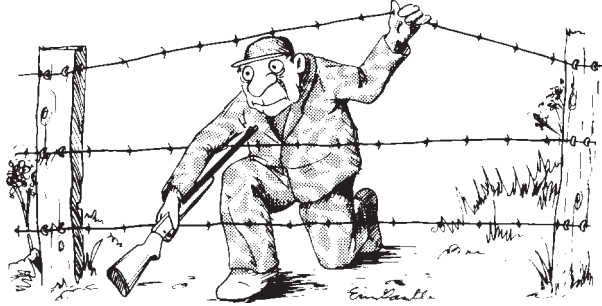
All Wisconsin hunters born on or after January 1, 1973 have had to take a hunter safety course before purchasing a hunting license. Some older hunters have also taken the course, often with their children. Turkey hunting safety depends on most of the principles taught in these courses, and all turkey hunters should be aware of the many unique aspects of turkey hunting safety.

## Basic hunter safety

Most hunting accidents can be prevented. They happen when people disregard firearm safety fundamentals. Prevention involves knowing and obeying basic safety rules. In fact, if you follow three basic rules for handling firearms you will prevent almost every firearm-related tragedy.

1. Treat every firearm as if it is loaded.  
Always check to make sure the gun is empty; never take anyone's word that the gun is unloaded. Check for yourself, open the action, look, then leave it open. "I didn't know it was loaded" is no excuse.
2. Always point the muzzle in a safe direction. Hunting experts always handle a gun safely. They never let the muzzle point at anybody including themselves. They also insist that everyone follow the same rules.
3. Be sure of your target and beyond. Responsible hunters are certain of the target before firing. They never shoot at a sound. They never shoot at a patch of color. They never shoot at anything except legal game. Then they are positive it's right before they shoot. They will pass up a great trophy gobbler rather than make a mistake and cause an accident.

You must be constantly alert when dealing with firearms and while hunting. However, there are certain times when you must be extra alert. Those times include when



*Proper gun handling is key to the prevention of hunting accidents. Never point a loaded or unloaded firearm at yourself or anyone else.*

you have had just enough experience to think you know all the answers; when carrying a firearm over rough country or obstacles; and when you are tired. When you first spot or think you spot your turkey, it's easy to rush into a careless shot. Always assume that every movement you see is another hunter until you have identified the key features of a turkey. When hunting partners forget or ignore the safety rules, tell them immediately.

## Camouflage safety

Hunter camouflage is an important part of hunting the wily turkey, but it may present a problem. The better you are camouflaged and concealed, the less likely another hunter will be able to see you, and the more likely you could be mistaken for a turkey and be shot at.



*Full camouflage is important and necessary for a safe and successful hunt. Photo compliments of Turkey and Turkey Hunting Magazine.*

To dress for success and safety follow these tips from the National Wild Turkey Federation:

1. Never wear pieces of clothing that contain the colors of red, white, or blue because they can be mistaken for colors found on wild turkeys.
2. Be sure that accessories you carry that are red, white, or blue (e.g. diaphragm calls, box call chalk, candy wrappers, apples, cigarette packs, etc.) are not visible to other hunters.
3. Camouflage your gun. At least cover up white diamonds or other red or white markings.
4. Always keep your hands and head camouflaged when calling.
5. Wear dark-colored socks and pants that are long enough to keep your bare skin from being exposed.
6. Do not "over-camouflage" by sitting in vegetation so thick that it obscures your vision.
7. If you use a man-made blind of camouflage netting, maintain a clear field of view.

Other safety measures you may wish to consider include placing a blaze orange band around the tree you sit next to; placing a blaze orange sign "Camouflaged Hunter in Area - Be Careful" in your vehicle window; and wearing some blaze orange while moving from one spot to another.

## Calling site location

Calling site selection is very important for both turkey hunting success and safety. You cannot shoot a turkey you cannot see. Moreover, gobblers do not like dense, brushy areas where they cannot see potential trouble from natural predators or hunters. Use calling sites where you can see at least 75-100 yards. Do not sit near the edge of a hill that you cannot see over; you may be surprised by a hunter or a turkey.

*When choosing your calling location, be sure to keep in mind that you will need to be able to see around you for safety as well as to get a shot at a tom.*



Sit against a tree or stump wider than your shoulders. Turkey hunting involves making turkey sounds with various devices. Some require movement on the part of the hunter. By choosing this large tree or stump, slight movements will be shielded from the view of hunters coming from behind whom you may not detect.

The proper way to notify an approaching hunter is to speak calmly and clearly. DO NOT move or wave. DO NOT use a turkey call to alert the hunter. If the other hunter does not respond to your first call, repeat louder to announce that you are near. Not everyone has good hearing; so it is paramount in this situation to remain still until acknowledged.

## Decoy use and safety

Decoys can be effective for bringing turkeys in close and taking their attention away from you, but caution should be used to avoid dangerous situations. Hunters may stalk your calls, see your decoy, and shoot at the decoy. If you are in line with the decoy you could be hit.

Follow these defensive hunting tips from the National Wild Turkey Federation:

1. A decoy should never be visible while being transported. Never carry an uncovered (identifiable) decoy any distance.
2. Whenever possible, set up by a "stand" tree that is greater in diameter than the width of your shoulders.
3. From your seated position, identify the clearest line of vision to your front. Establish a "sight line" that allows you 100 yards visibility. Then set your decoy approximately 20 yards from your position on the line.
4. Should you see another hunter, call out to them in a loud, clear voice. Their presence has already compromised your location and a "soft" call may only confuse them, rather than alerting them to your presence.
5. If you are calling over decoys and then elect to move to a new location, check carefully to ensure that no one is stalking your decoys. Check before leaving your "stand" tree. Should you see someone in the area, rule 4 applies.

You may also consider using one of the new decoys that incorporate some blaze orange color into the wing and tail feathers.

A variety of different set-ups can produce a variety of different results. Depending on the birds you are hunting, a full-strut gobble decoy may actually intimidate a mature but subordinate tom or, it may actually cause him to come running in so fast you can't get ready fast enough. Using a hen and jake set-up is typically more effective in attracting in the dominate gobblers. Placing the jake close to the hen in an attentive position may be the trick that draws that gobbler in those last five feet. It is important when using a jake decoy to use extreme caution and to place the decoy where you want the gobbler to be for the shot. Also, have the jake facing away from you so that when the gobbler confronts the jake, you will have an open shot at the vital area.



*When using decoys, be sure to use extreme caution. Other hunters can mistake your decoys for the real thing. Keeping safety in mind, decoys can lead to a very rewarding hunt. Photo compliments of Turkey and Turkey Hunting Magazine.*

## Controlling your reactions

Hunters should be aware that the mind can sometimes cause a person to “see” what the person wants to see. Hunters may sometimes “see” wildlife where there is none. This ability of the hunter’s mind to “create” a wild animal can be attributed partly to the strong desire to locate and bag game. The moment of high excitement is triggered as soon as a buck, bear, turkey or other game is seen, and it is in that moment of greatest excitement accidents can and do occur. Peer pressure and over-confidence has been shown to play a part in mental attitude, so re-consider each “opportunity” for a brief second and make sure it’s a bird and not another hunter.

Restrain your reflexes so you do not shoot without looking or without thinking. Here are some basic rules:

1. Never shoot at sounds or movements. Assume every sound you hear and movement you see is another human being until proven otherwise.
2. Never shoot at a patch of color. Positively identify it as a legal turkey first.
3. Always positively identify any target before raising your gun and be certain it is legal game.
4. Double check before you shoot. Consider placing a National Wild Turkey Federation “Hunt Safely” sticker on your gun’s receiver to remind you to make absolutely sure.

## Accident history

There is nothing like a review of the history of actual turkey hunting accidents to make the situation real. On the following page is a list of Wisconsin turkey hunting accidents by year. The majority of accidents were the result of a hunter failing to properly identify their target, often mistaking another person for a turkey. Always know where your hunting partners are and never assume that you are the only person hunting in that area.

## Turkey Hunter Education Clinics

Attend a Turkey Hunter Education Clinic sponsored jointly by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and the Wisconsin Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation in an area near you. These clinics will provide you with a wide range of information that will help you to be a knowledgeable, effective and safe hunter. Like this guide, the clinics focus on turkey biology and behavior, turkey management, turkey hunting techniques, special turkey hunting safety concerns, advanced turkey hunting techniques, and hunter-landowner relations. You will benefit from the many personal experiences of the clinic leaders and gain valuable information about a variety of different types of hunting equipment.

## Wisconsin turkey hunting accidents, 1983-2004

Spring Season	Number of accidents	Number of permits issued	# of accidents per 100,000 permits
1983	0	1,200	0.0
1984	0	1,900	0.0
1985	0	2,125	0.0
1986	0	3,495	0.0
1987	0	6,040	0.0
1988	1	11,071	9.0
1989	1	21,280	4.7
1990	2	29,887	6.7
1991	1	37,171	2.7
1992	2	43,972	4.5
1993	4	61,338	6.5
1994	3	71,420	4.2
1995	3	68,588	4.4
1996	0	75,360	0.0
1997	3	92,734	3.2
1998	1	100,347	1.0
1999	1	110,457	0.9
2000	3	132,318	2.3
2001	6	150,403	4.0
2002	6	159,542	3.8
2003	0	168,696	0.0
2004	3	185,369	1.6
<b>Total=</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>1,534,713</b>	<b>Average= 2.7</b>

Fall Season	Number of accidents	Number of permits issued	# of accidents per 100,000 permits
1988*	1	0	~
1989	1	7,160	14.0
1990	1	12,465	8.0
1991	2	16,671	12.0
1992	0	24,998	0.0
1993	2	31,449	6.4
1994	4	17,600	22.7
1995	2	29,858	6.7
1996	0	30,779	0.0
1997	4	32,185	12.4
1998	0	40,750	0.0
1999	1	55,479	1.8
2000	2	69,566	2.9
2001	2	71,601	2.8
2002	2	74,659	2.7
2003	2	78,751	2.5
<b>Total=</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>593,971</b>	<b>Average= 4.4</b>

\*not a season, hunter went hunting illegally



# Turkey hunting techniques

## Spring hunting tactics

The following hunting methods will help improve your spring turkey hunting success and satisfaction. But, remember that only about 20% of hunters actually bag a turkey. Although turkeys have certain patterns of behavior, turkey hunting is challenging because they are not totally predictable. Your success will depend on your selection of an area with good turkey numbers, your abilities to use your equipment, your willingness to adapt your hunting techniques to changing situations, your persistence, and a little bit of luck.

## Types of calls and calling techniques

The most effective way to get within shotgun distance of a spring gobbler is to reproduce the sounds a hen makes or “call” the gobbler. These hen sounds can be made with your voice or with some type of turkey calling device.

Commercially available turkey calls fall into two broad categories: friction calls, which produce sound by rubbing two surfaces together; and mouth calls, through which air is inhaled or exhaled. One other type of caller, a shaker, produces gobbles when you shake it in a rapid motion.

The easiest calls to master are friction calls such as a box call, push button, and calls that use a peg with either a slate, glass, or aluminum surface. The major disadvantage with these calls is that you cannot hold a shotgun and work them at the same time. This is important because you may spook your gobbler when you put the call down and raise the shotgun. A second disadvantage is that many of the calls do not work if they get wet. Placing your friction calls in a loose plastic bag will allow you to operate them during wet conditions. Many companies now make acrylic or carbon strikers that are water resistant and will work on any of the calling surfaces. The aluminum calls frequently produce a higher pitched tone that carries over a longer distance to attract the toms from farther away.



*Using a variety of calls can sometimes fool that wily tom into range. Photo compliments of Turkey and Turkey Hunting Magazine.*

Diaphragm mouth calls are popular among hunters. They are the most versatile caller but require much practice. They are unaffected by wet weather, allow the hunter to use both hands freely, and can be used without making any discernible movement. There are two other types of mouth calls, the turpin call and the wingbone call. Both produce realistic sounds, but require hand movement to operate.

Shaker calls are the only ones specifically designed to produce realistic-sounding gobbles. No practice is necessary; the sound is the same each time you shake them. They produce only the gobble sound and are not usually necessary for successful turkey hunting. Be sure to use extreme caution when calling with a gobbler shaker.

The type of call used is less important than how well the hunter masters calling techniques. The only way to learn turkey calling is to listen to live turkeys, a calling cassette tape, video or an experienced turkey hunter. Turkeys have more than two dozen different calls, but the hunter will rarely notice more than about 10. There are 9 basic sounds the hunter should be able to recognize. Listed below are the sounds and how to use them.

**Tree yelp.** This is the first turkey sound heard in the morning. It is a slow, soft, nasal sound, consisting of 3 or 4 yelps made only at daybreak from the roost. It is made when turkeys are just becoming visible in trees. It is a greeting call to make sure that all is well after a dark night of not seeing or hearing one another. This call can only be heard on still morn-

ings in a roosting area. Tree yelps should be the first call made by a turkey hunter who has set up near a roosted turkey. This is where scouting really pays off.

**Plain yelp.** The plain yelp is the one sound most people associate with turkeys. Turkeys use this sound to communicate with distant birds. The yelp is made by all turkeys in the fall, winter and spring. A yelp from a gobbler is lower pitched, more coarse, less musical and has fewer notes than a hen's. The plain yelp is best used routinely throughout the morning while hunting. Plain yelps are usually done in a series of 2 to 5 in a row and always have a very even rhythm. It is important to keep the yelps faster and more snappy, which is typical of a hen in the spring. Plain yelps will evoke a response from a spring gobbler and may call him in. It is the standard call when working a spring gobbler. Some hunters use it successfully with an occasional cluck. It is important to remember that the translation of any yelp depends largely on its volume, intensity, rhythm, and frequency. In other words, the duration and the number of times the call is repeated impacts its effectiveness, which varies with the amount of hunting pressure each bird has experienced.

**Cluck.** The cluck has several meanings. The sound is a short, soft, single-syllable, non-musical tone. It is used to gain another turkey's attention. If used too loudly it will alarm turkeys. It can be used in the following manner: "cluck (pause briefly), cluck, cluck, (pause), cluck (pause), cluck (pause), cluck, cluck." Its major use is to evoke an answering cluck from any nearby turkey. It works well because turkeys are curious

about any other turkey sound. Some successful hunters use an occasional cluck with the plain yelp in this manner: "cluck, (pause), yelp, yelp (pause), cluck, cluck (pause), yelp, yelp, yelp."

Another calling series that works well to attract a tom's attention is to make three yelps, rising in volume, pause briefly, and then produce two soft clucks. Repeat this call two or three times as the situation demands. Turkeys have excellent hearing, so call softly.

**Purr.** The purr is a soft call used by turkeys when communicating to each other. Hunters often use purrs with clucks when gobblers are in close, but not quite close enough.

**Putt.** This is a short, sharp, loud cluck. It sounds very similar to the cluck, only the cluck is softer and less distinct. It will not call in turkeys, but you should know the call when you hear it, because it is the worst sound a calling hunter can make. It is the alarm call of the turkey, and generally will be the last call you hear before a turkey departs.

**Cackle.** A cackle is an excited call of a hen and is often emitted when flying down from a roost. It is usually a series of 12 or more clucks which rise abruptly in pitch and cadence and then gradually decline in pitch and cadence. Often the clucks are very short and staccato.

**Cut.** A cut is a short, staccato cluck and is usually emitted by the hen in a series varying in length and cadence. It is often used by an aggravated hen as she defends her nesting territory from other hens, but it will often excite a gobbler.

**Gobble.** The gobble has limited use and affects turkeys in two ways: hens hear a potential mate and gobblers hear a potential rival. Gobblers may investigate other gobbling in their vicinity and may fight uninvited gobblers. The gobble call will help you locate a gobbler but may not bring him into shotgun range.

Extreme caution should be used when using a gobble call as it may attract other hunters into your calling territory, and you may find yourself being hunted by another turkey hunter. For that reason gobbles are not recommended while hunting but can be effective to locate roosting birds in the evening.

*Hunting with a partner can benefit your hunt by allowing one of you to call while the other gets ready for the bird. Photo compliments of Turkey and Turkey Hunting Magazine.*



Beginners should keep several points in mind. It is better to call too softly than too loudly, to call too rarely than too frequently, and to perfect one or two calls rather than attempt some sound not yet mastered. Timing, or rhythm, can be more important than the actual quality of sound. Finally, remember that no two turkeys sound alike and what works on one gobbler might send the next one in another direction. If a gobbler will not respond to your call, try more or less frequent calling and try different types of calls.

If, while calling, a tom cuts off your calling in the middle of your yelps, ease off the calls and allow more time between your calling. Another technique to try while calling is called "cutting and running." Cutting and running refers to a calling sequence that includes a series of exited cutts followed immediately by a series of five to six yelps. This calling sequence is an excellent attention grabber and can typically be more effective later in the morning when trying to locate additional birds.

Another point to remember, if you are actively calling to a tom and he has been responding but he stops abruptly, get ready. Frequently, hunters will assume that when a tom stops calling back he has lost interest but actually he may be closing the distance silently. Keep your eyes open.

## Camouflage

A wild turkey's eyesight is estimated to be about 10 times better than a human's. In addition, turkeys can distinguish color to some degree and are quick to spot unnatural colors in their environment. For this reason, turkey hunters should avoid clothing that will draw attention.

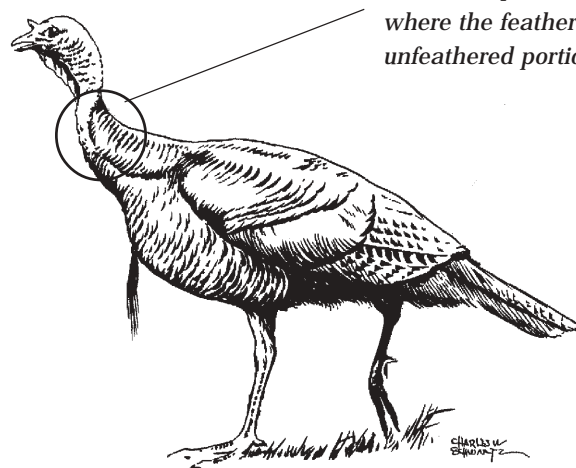
The best camouflage is both protective and comfortable. Many hunters make the mistake of camouflaging everything except their face and hands. This is a serious mistake because the face and hands reflect light, and they are the body parts a hunter is most likely to move. Face masks can obscure vision and lead to over-heating. Facial greases are more comfortable but tend to run if you get hot. Some new models of face masks have provisions for fitting around the frames of glasses, and are less likely to cause glasses to fog up.

When choosing your camouflage pattern, try to match the camouflage to the foliage most commonly found in your area. If you are hunting an earlier period, choose a pattern that has more brown and gray to match the bare branches but if your hunting a later period, a camouflage pattern with more green in it will be more effective. Mixing patterns by using a more brown pattern on the bottom and a green foliage pattern on the top will help you more closely resemble the natural environment.

Gun camouflage is also important because the gun barrel reflects light. Camouflage tape and camouflage spray paint work well to mask the gun's shiny appearance.

## Firearms and patterning

The different choices of firearms for turkey hunting are numerous. In Wisconsin, bow and arrow, shotgun or muzzle-loading shotgun hunting are legal. Shotgunners take great pride in their skill with the turkey call and in the art of concealment. To these hunters, calling the turkey in close (less than 40 yards) is the essence of the sport. The objective is to deliver a dense shot pattern into the area of the turkey's head and neck.



*Aim at the point on the neck where the feathered and unfeathered portions meet.*

The 12-gauge is the overwhelming choice, because turkey hunters want a gun that can use a variety of heavy loads capable of one-shot kills. Because of the small target offered by the head and neck, dense patterns are preferred. For this reason, full-choke barrels are used on most turkey guns. Since most turkey hunters travel rather long distances in pretty rough country, gun weight can be an important factor in hunter comfort and a sling may be advisable.



Heavy guns seem even heavier when holding it up for a period of time waiting for a turkey to get into position for a shot.

There is some difference of opinion among experienced hunters regarding optimum shot size. Most turkey hunters use small shot (4's, 5's, and 6's), the most popular being number 6. State law requires that shot size be number 4 lead or smaller or number 2 steel or smaller for safety reasons. Some shells are "buffered" to protect shot from deforming, resulting in a tighter pattern. Some of these loads have copper plating to give even tighter patterns.

A variety of loads will do the job when fired from a well-aimed barrel at close range. The three-inch magnum 12-gauge loads containing  $1\frac{5}{8}$  and  $1\frac{7}{8}$  ounces of shot are more than adequate. The most important factor to consider when selecting the appropriate shotgun and load is the pattern they produce. Shotguns should be patterned in order to determine the character of the pattern and whether or not the gun puts its pattern on the point of aim. To see how well your gun patterns, copy the life-sized head and neck turkey target on the back of this handbook and place it on a board at no more than 40 yards from where you fire your gun. Fire several loads at the turkey's head and neck, each time counting the number of holes in the vital area (immobilization area). Repeat this procedure with different loads. Six or more pellets in the vital area indicate a killing pattern. Become familiar with the relative size of a turkey at 25, 35 and 40 yards. Never shoot at a turkey beyond 40 yards.

*When sighting in your shotgun, positioning yourself as you will be when you are hunting can be beneficial and is highly recommended. Photo by Robert Queen.*



## Equipment checklist

You may wish to use the following checklist to make sure that you are not forgetting to take something on your next hunting trip. Not all items are necessary, but all may be useful.

Camo Gloves	Decoy
Camo Coat	Shells
Camo Hat	Cushion
Camo Pants	Decoy bag
Camo Face Mask	Camera
or Netting	Mosquito repellent
Camo Vest	Binoculars
Water Bottle	Turkey calls
Gun	Shock calls
Sling	Hand pruning shears
Rope	Flashlight

## Scouting

The first and most important step in turkey hunting is to scout the woods before the season opens. Turkeys favor certain areas and will use them year after year if the habitat does not change. Using topographic maps that indicate vegetation cover are an excellent way to pinpoint key hot spots such as ridges, strutting areas and field edges, especially if you are unfamiliar with the area you are planning on hunting. By narrowing down your scouting possibilities, you can make more effective and efficient use of the limited amount of time you have prior to the season.

A good time to scout an area is a week or two before the season starts, particularly if there is a light snowfall. Look for turkeys and turkey signs such as tracks, feathers and droppings along the edge of a woods, in stubble corn field, in areas of high oak concentrations, or on logging roads and trails. You may also find dusting areas with tracks in them or tree roosts with droppings under them. If possible, try to pattern the bird or birds you are trying to hunt. If you know where and when the birds are moving, you can sometimes position yourself between the tom and the hens or closer to the tom so that you are the first "hen" that he hears in the morning.

Your objective in scouting should be to identify those areas that gobblers frequent. These areas include roosting sites, feeding sites and strutting areas. Roost trees are frequently mature hardwoods with horizontal limbs reaching out over the forest floor

and typically near water. If you spend a good deal of time in the woods, you may also be able to determine regular movement patterns. Best times to look or listen for turkeys include the early morning hours from one-half hour before sunrise until mid-morning. Although gobblers may roost or strut in different areas, you will learn the locations they prefer.

If you do not hear gobblers calling, try a crow call, owl call or other shock caller in early morning or just before dark. Gobblers will often respond, giving away their location.

While scouting pay close attention to large trees that you may want to sit next to while hunting. Also note the location of fences, ravines, dense brush or streams that may keep a gobbler from coming to your call during the season.

If you are lucky enough to spot some turkeys while scouting, make note of the surroundings and identify why the birds are in that area. Then, as you continue your scouting trip, look for areas that have characteristics similar to that area.

Also look for areas where turkeys are feeding. Food for turkeys varies greatly depending on the area where the birds are found. Pin-pointing what they are eating and when, will greatly improve your odds come the hunting season.

It is important to get a thorough understanding of the area that you are planning to hunt. Typically the weather is not always sunny with little or no wind. Knowing where turkeys are going to be during different types of weather conditions can be very beneficial. On windy days when it may be difficult to hear, birds will frequently be found in open areas where they can use their eyes to protect them from predators. These open areas can include log landings, fields, or openings in the forest that are protected from the wind. Knowing where these areas are will be a big benefit if the conditions are less than perfect.

### Putting it all together

If possible visit the land you will hunt the day or two prior to hunting. This will re-familiarize you with the land, and you can determine whether turkeys are still using the areas you saw them in earlier.



*Locating birds, such as these before the season starts by finding tracks in the snow, can improve your odds of bagging a bird once the season starts. Photo by Neal Paisley.*

One successful technique that can greatly improve a turkey hunter's chance of locating a bird is "putting a gobbler to bed." During the early evening on the day before you are going to hunt, position yourself on a ridge top or at the mouth of a valley. Take out a crow call, owl hooter, or gobble box and give a call. If a gobbler answers, try to pinpoint his location, noting prominent features where the gobble seemed to come from. If time allows, move to another location and repeat this procedure. This will help determine his exact location. Get up early the following morning, well before sunrise, and sneak to within 100-150 yards of the gobbler's roost tree. You should be in place at least one hour before sunrise.

If you were unable to locate a roosted gobbler the night before, try again early the morning of your hunt. Listen for a gobbler when it gets light enough for songbirds to begin singing, which is well before sunrise. If there aren't any calling, try to shock him



*Taking a child or spouse hunting and teaching them the joys of hunting can be a very rewarding experience. Photo compliments of Turkey and Turkey Hunting Magazine.*



*Good planning and patience in the field can lead to success at the end of the day. Photo compliments of Turkey and Turkey Hunting Magazine.*

into gobbling with a loud owl hoot or crow call. It is not advisable to use turkey sounds until you are concealed and ready. If you do not hear a gobbler, you should move to another area, watching for strutting gobblers, listening for gobbles, and trying shock calls to locate a gobbler. Do not sit all morning at one spot unless you are confident that gobblers frequent the area.

Determining the exact location of a gobbler can be difficult. The distance the gobbler can be heard and direction from which the sound seems to come, are influenced by topography, wind direction and velocity, the direction in which the tom is facing, and the extent to which the trees are leafed out.

In the coulee country, turkeys prefer to roost at or slightly below the top of a ridge and will gobble at daybreak prior to leaving the roost. If you hear a turkey gobbling on a roost near the top of a ridge, remember that it is easier to call a bird up a hill than down one. In addition, if you try calling from too far away he will ignore you, especially if he has a hen nearby.

After locating a roosting bird try to get within 100-150 yards in a suitable location to begin calling. Choose a calling site very carefully, as this will probably be the most important decision of the day's hunt. Try to pick a spot that a turkey will likely go, such as a logging road or opening in the woods near his roost. Keep in mind that gobblers like to show off for their hens, so a clearing or field edge that catches rays of the rising sun is a good bet for early morning calling. Also, make it easy for the gobbler to get to your calling location. Don't expect him to wade through thick brush or cross a fence. Most important, however, is to choose a site such as a large tree where you have good visibility in all directions. Being able to see the gobbler, identifying your target and having a clear shot is critical.

After legal shooting hours begin, start calling softly. A good first call is the "tree-yelp." This tells the gobbler that a hen is roosting nearby. When the gobbler hears it, he will often instantly gobble back. When that happens, stop calling and get ready. Generally within the next 10-15 minutes you will either see or hear him. You may be able to hear him fly down, and his gobbles will usually sound farther away once he is

on the ground. If he is coming your way be very patient. If he is within sight do not call or he will surely see you. If you give him time, chances are he will work right up to you. If you have positioned yourself up against a big tree, wait until he is well within 40 yards before you shoot.

If after about 10 minutes the gobbler does not answer your "tree-yelp", try a series of plain yelps and clucks. It may be that the gobbler you "put to bed" last night has already assembled with a group of hens. In this case, listen for gobbles and yelps. Remember also that if a gobbler is already with some hens he may not gobble much and may not be interested in your calls. If you run into a situation where a tom already has hens with him, try aggressively calling to the hens to attract both the hens and the gobbler to you. Specifically calling to the dominant hen may bring her in to investigate.

Another option to try when toms and hens are already together is to walk in and break the birds up, trying to separate the toms from the hens. After about a half hour, start calling to the tom and hopefully he will respond. Like all hunting techniques, the birds may not respond as well after they have been disturbed.

When birds are heavily hunted, they may hang up out of range and are very difficult to bring in that last 50 yards. One technique that can be tried when you are hunting with a partner is to have the person calling move directly away from the interested tom. Only move after the tom has responded and you know where he is. This will sometimes fool the tom into thinking that the "hen" is moving away and cause him to follow, thus, bring him closer to the other silent hunter. It is very important that the caller move very quietly, never break twigs, and stay out of sight so that they don't spook the tom. Be sure to keep your eyes open because the tom may come in silently once he gets close.

When all other techniques have failed and the tom is still holding out of range and hung-up, try rustling the leaves in a scratching pattern when the tom isn't looking. This may be all of the reassurance he needs to come in.



If the birds are far away, move as quickly and quietly as possible to a place where the bird can be called. Once in place, try a series of clucks. This really works well if the gobbler has just finished servicing his hens. Sometimes he will come right away; other times he will wait, expecting the hen to come to him. If he doesn't come after 5 minutes and you know he is still in the area, repeat the series of clucks. If your gobbler is still in the area but has not come into your call, try other calls such as a "cut" or "cackle" or any type of call that excites him to try to bring him into range. Sometimes aggressive calling will work while soft, infrequent calling works better at other times—experiment.

Many hunters use a decoy to entice a gobbler into gun range and draw the turkey's attention away from them. Hunters who use decoys will experience a variety of results. Some gobblers will fight with or try to mount decoys. Others will strut for hours around a fake hen. Yet, other turkeys will run the other direction or hang up when they first spot a decoy. Decoys appear to be more effective earlier in the season than later, but can be useful anytime in the season.

If you can tell that a gobbler is moving away from you, one option is to try to get to where he is going. If the gobbler is moving back and forth along a ridge, you may be able to move to a site along his track while he is at the farthest point from you. But, if you move often, sooner or later you will find that the gobbler is where you just moved from. It often pays to stay in one location for at least 45 minutes to an hour.

When a gobbler does come toward you, have your gun ready before it comes into view. You may want to rest your elbows on your knees while holding the gun. You can lift your gun when a turkey walks behind a large tree, but watch for other turkeys with the gobbler that may see you move. Once a turkey is in an open area in front of you, movement of your gun will send him flying or running, leaving you without a shot. Wait to see if the turkey turns away while strutting, causing his tail to block his view of you; that is the time to move.

As many hunters know, wildlife habits change with adverse weather conditions, and turkey habits are no different. Since weather conditions are not always ideal, it

is important to have alternative plans in place before heading to the field. During rainy and windy days, you may be better off concentrating your efforts on more open areas instead of smaller strutting zones or heavily timbered locations. When it is windy and raining, turkeys can't hear as well and rely on their eyesight to locate predators. As a result, birds tend to move toward more open areas where they can see longer distances. When using your calls on these types of days, increased volume may be necessary to make contact with the birds.

If conditions are cool and that rain turns into snow, you may want to make a few changes in your hunting strategy. When the snow falls, mating activity typically decreases and the birds are less active. As a result, it will take longer to entice a tom into range and it is important to not sound too excited when making your calls. Also, hunting later in the day when the temperature has warmed, the birds may be slightly more active and may be more responsive to calls.



Another change in your hunting strategy is to focus your hunting efforts on south-facing slopes where the forest will receive the largest amount of direct sunlight. As a result, the south-facing slopes will have vegetation sprouting the earliest and have the least amount of snow, leaving the available food sources exposed.

Do not shoot while a gobbler is in full strut. Wait until his head and neck are held up away from his body. If you are ready to shoot, a cluck on a mouth call will often bring the gobbler out of strut; shoot immediately when the turkey's head is raised. Remember, the head and neck are the only killing shots you have on a turkey so make sure you have a clear shot at them before you pull the trigger.

*When hunting in rolling terrain, be sure to stay alert because a tom can crest a hill and spot you first if you don't. DNR photo.*



*When hunting conditions deteriorate, look for turkeys in more open areas where they can use their vision to search out predators. Photo by Robert Wright.*

If you shoot a turkey, engage the safety on the gun and immediately run toward the downed bird. Many times a turkey will only be stunned and will regain his senses and try to escape. By running toward the bird you can cut the distance for a second shot if needed, or physically subdue the bird. Placing a knee on top of the bird and breaking its neck is a good technique to use if the need arises. Use caution if you grab for the legs as the spurs of the turkey have injured many hunters.

If your hunt does not go as expected, you are not alone. That is the challenge of turkey hunting. Keep trying. Persistent, patient hunters are the most successful. Gobblers that do not respond to a call early one morning may respond later in the morning after hens leave for their nest or on a subsequent day.

Turkey hunting is among the finest of the woodland sports. The attraction is not based primarily on harvesting a wild turkey but rather on the hunting experience. Whether you carry a gun or a camera, few types of hunting in Wisconsin require as much knowledge of woods lore and animal behavior as locating a turkey gobbler and then successfully calling him to you. For those who have experienced it, the spring turkey hunt is often their favorite.

With changes in the closing time for the spring season, afternoon hunting will now be possible. Typically during the afternoon feeding period, birds are likely to be found around timber edges, in pastures, or in other open feeding areas that are relatively close to good roosting areas. When calling, unless the tom is actively responding to your calls, call sparingly. Hens, like toms, are less active during the afternoon and calling too aggressively may scare the birds

away. If a tom starts responding to your calls, work him similar to how you would in the morning but allow him additional time to come into your calls.

## Fall hunting tactics

There has been a fall wild turkey hunting season in Wisconsin since 1989. During the fall, all turkeys, male and female, are legal for harvest, and hunting techniques are quite different from spring. One of the more successful techniques is to locate and break up a fall brood flock and call them back for a close killing shot. Locating a brood flock often requires a great deal of time and woodsmanship. However, local landowners can often give hunters information on flock locations. Large brood flocks, which are made up of hens and their young of the year, leave similar sign as spring turkeys, but on a larger scale. Look for tracks, droppings and the telltale feeding areas with windrows of leaves scratched in a line. Fall brood flocks are quite verbal, so listen for turkey talk as you scout for the flock.

Once a flock is located a good break up of the flock is mandatory for a successful hunt with this technique. Many hunters rush the flock, shouting or even shooting in the air to startle the flock into scattering. After you have broken up the flock, locate a calling site near the point of the break up. Wait about one-half hour or until you hear birds calling before you try to call them.

The most frequently used call in the fall, which is also effective in the spring, is the “kee kee run” or lost bird call. It is a high pitched “kee kee kee” in a series followed usually by a yelp or two. Normally the young birds will “kee kee” in an attempt to locate each other a short time after you have broken up the flock. By responding to this sound you can get them to approach within gun range.

Another call to try if the “kee kee run” call is unsuccessful is a hen assembly call. This is the call of an adult hen to gather her flock. It is a long series of yelps raising slightly in volume and pitch and then declining in volume and pitch. Hens will often use a series of 15 to 20 yelps for a gathering call. This will often lure a young bird within gun range.

A technique for locating fall flocks is to locate a roost by listening for soft yelps and

birds flying into trees the evening before your hunt. If you can locate a roost, the roosted turkeys can usually be scattered at day break. It is also possible to scatter roosting birds after shooting hours the night before in the same way you would during the day.

Hunters have also had success calling adult gobblers and hens by locating their flock and reproducing the calls they are making. Often a gobbler flock will approach a coarse gobbler yelp to investigate the intruder. Successful fall gobbler hunting requires a great deal of patience and woodsmanship. Another technique worth trying if you are working adults without young is to reproduce their call exactly and add more aggressive calls after each series.

If you have been able to keep a close eye on a flock of birds, another technique that works well is get to know their pattern and ambush them when they pass through that area. Placing yourself along a trail or field edge that turkey have been using frequently can be a very effective technique.

## Special bow hunting considerations

Hunting turkeys with bow and arrow is an exciting and challenging sport for a growing number of Wisconsin hunters. Hunting gobblers in the spring or flocks of young birds in the fall is considered the ultimate challenge by most experienced archers. Bagging turkeys consistently is possible if attention is paid to equipment, blinds, use of decoys, shot placement, and recovery techniques.

Hunting with bow and arrow presents some unique challenges:

- Movement required to shoot the bow must be hidden due to the superior eyesight of turkeys.
- The vital area on a turkey is very small (3-4 inches in diameter). Proper shot placement is critical.
- Recovery of wounded turkeys is difficult, but can be aided by special equipment.

### Equipment

All equipment should be camouflaged or of a dark color because turkeys have excellent color vision. Don't use brightly-colored arrow fletchings. However, you can use any

color inside a full-coverage ground blind, because you're hidden.

Most successful hunters use high-let-off compounds. Compound bows are good choices because they shoot very flat and require less strength to hold at full draw. For those hunters who chose to hunt without the aid of a full-coverage ground blind, a better choice may be a fast-shooting recurve or long bow. With the instinctive style of shooting used by many traditional archery hunters, a quick shot is possible. Bow draw weights from 45 to 70 pounds are adequate.

Broadhead selection for turkey hunting is a hotly debated issue. Despite the claims of proponents of dull, specially designed or expanding-blade broadheads or blunts, most experienced turkey hunters use sharp, wide-cutting broadheads. Washers or other feather-grabbing devices behind the broadhead are not necessary. Advocates of the special broadheads or stopper devices claim that more shock will be created if the arrow stays in the bird making recovery easier. Recovery depends more on where the turkey was hit than on whether or not the arrow stayed in. Most arrows that hit a turkey will stay in without the aid of one of these special devices, because turkeys are heavily muscled and thickly boned.



*Bow hunting is the ultimate challenge in turkey hunting. Photo by Roger Raisch.*

Since a turkey is a small target, accessories that improve accuracy are recommended. These include bow and peep sights, shooting tabs, and releases. Use bright-colored or fluorescent sight pins or paint dull-colored pins white. This way, they will show up brightly against the dark colors of a turkey.



A turkey's hearing is good, so eliminate any noisy bow accessories or moving parts. Lube wheels on compound bows, put mole-skin around the arrow rest, quiet squeaky limbs and tighten up any screws, bolts or other noise-making components.

### Blinds and tree stands

Bow hunters suffer a major obstacle to making good, clean shots at wary, nervous turkeys. Turkeys have keen eyesight and will detect the movement required to draw and shoot a bow, especially at close bow ranges. A bow hunter who hunts without a blind has a poor chance for success. Using a blind is the only consistent way to get close shots at undisturbed turkeys.

There are two major types of blinds—elevated or ground. Ground blinds are the best and are either portable or constructed with brush and vegetation. Sharp-eyed turkeys constantly scan trees for signs of danger from above. This means that you will be seen in a tree stand even if you do not move. Besides making you more visible to turkeys, tree stands have other disadvantages. Permanent stands for deer are often not in good locations for turkey hunting. Portable stands can be used, but the noise and general commotion involved in erecting one can spook turkeys.

Blind location is critical. In the fall, this should be within 30 yards of the point where you scattered a flock. In the spring,

precise location is not as important, but good strutting areas, roost sites, or feeding areas are preferable.

### Ground blinds made with brush or camouflage netting

Select an “ambush tree” before deciding on a location to construct your blind. This tree should have a large diameter, because it is the obstacle that you want a turkey to walk behind. When the bird goes behind it, you can make the necessary movements to draw your bow without being seen.

Next, select a small “blind tree” within 15 feet of the “ambush tree” to build your blind. Gather brush or cut small, low-hanging branches from trees and build a nearly complete circle around the “blind tree”, leaving only a small 6-9 inch opening facing the ambush tree. Camouflage netting will also work, but it must be tight and high enough to completely cover the hunter. Sit on a stool or bucket and hang your bow on a hook that has been attached to the tree. Hold your bow and have your hands in shooting position. When a turkey goes behind the ambush tree, quickly and quietly draw your bow. Shoot when the bird walks into the open.

Some hunters have had success placing several large, round hay bales together to form a natural blind in open postures where turkeys are known to go. Leave small openings between the bales to shoot from.

Another type of ground blind is made by staking out camouflage netting in a “V” shape. Sit on a stool or bucket at the small end of the “V” and make certain that a large tree is positioned in the center of the large end of the “V.” The tree can either be inside or slightly outside the netting. Draw your bow when the turkey goes behind the tree. Shoot when it walks into the open.

Blinds made with netting or natural vegetation can be effective, but they have their drawbacks. They may take too much time to construct, be in a poor location when it is time to hunt, not completely conceal movement, and turkeys may not be in proper shooting position.

### Portable full-coverage blinds

Full-coverage blinds are used by most seasoned turkey hunters and photographers.

*Full coverage blinds allow hunters of all types move about easily and allow them to shoot without being seen. Photo by Roger Raisch.*



Their advantages include:

- Hides all movement
- Precise positioning
- More convenient
- No damage to vegetation
- Portable
- Fast set-up
- Lightweight
- Shots possible from any angle
- Self-supporting with lightweight poles
- All weather hunting
- Safer
- Birds don't change patterns as easily
- More comfortable
- Good for youth hunting

The most effective and comfortable blinds are large, providing plenty of room for movement. Other desired features are a roof to keep out light and weather. Medium-weight camouflage cotton cloth is best for a blind of this type, because other fabrics may be too noisy, especially on windy days.

Shooting windows around the entire circumference of the blind will provide shots at any turkey that comes within bow range. These windows should have covering flaps to conceal any movement of the hunter until just prior to the shot. Install grommets in the blind to see through.

Full coverage blinds also work well when placed in open fields and areas where birds are known to travel or congregate. Turkeys have little or no fear of blinds, as long as there is little movement of the blind material. It is very important to keep the blind fabric taught so that it isn't able to flap in the wind. Using blinds in wide open areas is an especially effective technique in rainy and windy weather when turkeys rely on their vision to detect danger and as a result, utilize open areas more frequently.

### Decoy tactics

Turkeys either love or hate decoys depending on their mood and the time of year. Spring gobblers can often be enticed into close bow range with a decoy. Members of fall flocks are not always as easily fooled.

Most experienced bow hunters use a hen decoy. Positioning a decoy is very important. If your decoy is too far away, say 25 yards, and a turkey comes in on the far side and sees it at 20 yards, the bird may hang up. Then it is out of range at 45 yards. For maximum effectiveness, place a decoy no more than 10 yards away.

Some hunters use more than one hen decoy, a jake decoy, or a small flock of decoys. The theory is that a turkey will be enticed to join up with the flock or a tom may be enraged due to a jake being present. These tactics don't always work. Seasoned bow hunters occasionally report watching gobblers ignore jake decoys and fight hen decoys. Several decoys provide added opportunity for a turkey to see something interesting, but it also increases safety problems. Most hunters use only one hen decoy.

### Shot placement

The best shot is one that breaks the turkey's backbone or spine. This will immediately immobilize it. For the best chance to hit the spine, wait until the bird is standing erect with its back toward you. Aim for the middle of the back. If the turkey is feeding or walking with its head down, the moving spine presents a poor target. A turkey with its head down can be made to stand erect by making one or two sharp putts or clucks with your call.

A hit in the neck is equally effective, but the neck is small and difficult to hit consistently. An attempt at a neck shot will either kill the bird instantly or miss it completely.

If the turkey is facing you, an arrow placed four inches below the base of the neck is good. This will be approximately an inch below where the beard is attached to a male turkey. The arrow should break the back as it exits the body, and should cause damage to the heart or lungs, or break a wing or leg.

A broadside shot can be good if you hit the point where the wing connects to the turkey's body, just below the spine. This is a relatively high position on the body. It will break a wing or the spine, or pierce the heart or lungs.

Shooting a strutting gobbler is risky business because his feathers are puffed up making the location of a vital area difficult to determine. Make a cluck or two to bring the gobbler out of strut. Sometimes a gobbler won't come out of strut. In those situations, the best opportunity for a vital hit is when he turns his fanned tail toward you. Aim at the vent or base of the tail. Your arrow should hit the heart, lungs, or liver and may also break a leg or wing.



*Proper aiming points when hunting with a bow and arrow. Photos by Roger Raisch.*

## Recovering wounded turkeys

A bird hit in the spine will collapse immediately. An arrow that pierces the heart or lungs, without breaking a leg or wing, may require you to do a little searching. A similar hit that breaks a leg or wing will generally result in a quick recovery.

But often, bow hunters will be faced with the problem of trying to recover a bird that was hit in a non-vital area. A turkey that does not drop in its tracks after a hit is difficult to recover. Wounded turkeys will instantly fly or run away, even with an arrow in them. There will usually be no blood trail, no trail of feathers and no tracks to follow.

A wounded bird that runs or flies away should be pursued immediately, keeping it in sight or within hearing. Listen for the sounds of the bird running in the leaves or the flapping of its heavy wings. Regardless of the situation, you should try to mark the direction of flight or running. If you heard the turkey make a crash landing, pinpoint the location.

Wounded turkeys will normally find a hiding spot within 200 yards. They will hide almost anywhere. You may find them in brush piles, under or by a log, in a creek bed, under leaves or bushes, in tall grass, in a hayfield, under a large rock outcropping

or up against the base of a large tree. Shoot another arrow into a wounded bird to anchor it, unless it is obviously dead.

Fortunately, there are products that will help a bow hunter recover turkeys. Responsible bow hunters should never shoot an arrow at a turkey without the aid of a recovery system. String trackers, heat-sensing detectors, arrows with audible tones, and arrows that contain small radio transmitters are all examples of effective recovery systems.

String tracking devices have been around the longest, and have proven very effective. A properly installed string tracker will allow accurate shooting up to 25 yards. Correct installation involves positioning the tracker on the bow so that it is near the arrow being shot. Practice shooting with a tracker to become accustomed to its operation before going afield. To help prevent breakage of the line, use heavy 30-pound line.

Heat-sensing detectors have proven effective in recovering larger game such as deer, but less evidence exists to prove their worth on smaller-bodied game such as turkeys. Arrows with audible tones or with small radio transmitters can both be effective, but only when the arrow remains in the turkey. Most often, an arrow will stay in a turkey, making these devices effective.



*String trackers improve your odds of recovering birds and should be mounted close to and directly above the arrow to decrease the impact it has on arrow flight. Photo by Roger Raisch.*

## Comparison of various recovery systems

Recovery System	Advantages	Disadvantages
String Trackers	Low cost Direct tracking	String may break Can affect arrow flight
Heat-Sensing Detector	Consistent operation	May not detect a turkey more than a few yards away Higher cost
Audible Tone Arrows	Effective to several hundred yards and for many hours Moderate cost	Arrow may not stay in turkey Higher cost
Arrows with Radio Transmitters	Direct tracking at longer ranges Effective for many hours	Arrow may not stay in turkey Higher cost



# Scoring trophies

Any turkey is a magnificent bird and considered a trophy by most hunters. However, some like to compare their turkey to other large turkeys taken across the state or country. The Wisconsin DNR does not keep information on record birds but the National Wild Turkey Federation does. For current NWTF members, the federation scores birds based on a combination of the birds weight, beard length(s) and spur lengths. In addition to this overall score, the NWTF also keeps track of record birds in each of these categories.

The formula for overall score is: weight (lbs.) plus 10 times each spurs length (right & left) plus 2 times the beard length(s). All measurements are recorded to the nearest sixteenth of an inch and converted to a decimal measurement. Birds should be weighed prior to field dressing and the weight must be measured to the nearest ounce (for example, 28 lbs. 3 oz. = 28.1875 points). Spurs must be measured along the outside center, from the point at which the spur protrudes from the scaled leg skin to the tip of the spur (for example, left spur 1 inch plus right spur 1 1/16 inches times 10 = 20.625 points). Beard length is measured from the center point of the protrusion from the skin, to the end of the longest bristle (for example, 12 2/16 inches times 2 = 24.25 points). Turkeys with multiple beards must have each beard measured and recorded separately. The total score for the turkey in this example would be 28.1875 + 20.625 + 24.25 = 73.0625.

The NWTF requires that weights must be recorded from scales inspected and certified as accurate for trade by the state department of agriculture, and that birds weighing over 22 pounds must have a weight coupon or signed document presented for proof as well as an additional witness who is an active member of the NWTF. Pictures of measurements are required for beard(s) over 12 inches in total length and spurs over 1.5

inches along with an NWTF witness signature. To officially register your turkey with the National Wild Turkey Federation, write Entry Rules & Application, National Wild Turkey Federation, P.O. Box 530, Edgefield, SC, 29824-0530 or call (803) 637-3106 or FAX your request to (803) 637-0034.

## Work Sheet for Scoring Turkeys

Weight

\_\_\_\_\_ Pounds \_\_\_\_\_ Ounces = \_\_\_\_\_

Spur Lengths

Left \_\_\_\_\_ X 10 = \_\_\_\_\_

Right \_\_\_\_\_ X 10 = \_\_\_\_\_

Beard Length

\_\_\_\_\_ Inches X 2 = \_\_\_\_\_

Total Points \_\_\_\_\_

## Conversion Table

Weight	Measurements
1 OZ. = .0625	1/16 = .0625
2 OZ. = .1250	1/8 = .1250
3 OZ. = .1875	3/16 = .1875
4 OZ. = .2500	1/4 = .2500
5 OZ. = .3125	5/16 = .3125
6 OZ. = .3750	3/8 = .3750
7 OZ. = .4375	7/16 = .4375
8 OZ. = .5000	1/2 = .5000
9 OZ. = .5625	9/16 = .5625
10 OZ. = .6250	5/8 = .6250
11 OZ. = .6875	11/16 = .6875
12 OZ. = .7500	3/4 = .7500
13 OZ. = .8125	13/16 = .8125
14 OZ. = .8750	7/8 = .8750
15 OZ. = .9375	15/16 = .9375

# Trophy mounts

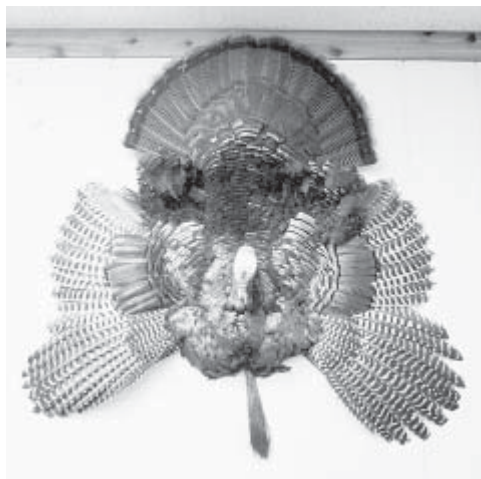
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*Using care while handling your prize when in the field will greatly increase your chances of having a beautiful wall mount.*

*Photos by Eric Lobner.*

Many hunters will want to have all or part of their turkey mounted. The most common mounts are those with the tail, beard and wings displayed. The beard needs no special treatment to be displayed. The tail fan should be spread out and pinned to cardboard or styrofoam. Sprinkle salt and Borax on the fleshy part of the tail.



Allow the fan to dry for several weeks and it will remain fanned out. To protect your turkey mount from moths, rub Borax into the feathers.

If you are considering a full mount, it requires extra care in the field. Most taxidermists would prefer that you not field dress the bird, and may even charge extra if there was improper field care. If possible, bring the ungutted bird to a taxidermist the day it is shot. If the weather is warm, you will want to make sure the bird is kept cool until you can take it to the taxidermist. If you must field dress the turkey, be very careful not to get blood on the feathers. Laying the bird on its back and sprinkling corn meal liberally on the cut as it is being made will help to soak up excess blood. You may also want to stuff paper towel or cotton inside the mouth, nostrils, and shot holes of the bird to soak up any draining blood.

# Field dressing and cleaning

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Turkeys that are not going to be mounted should be field dressed like any other upland bird. This is done by cutting from the vent to the brisket and removing the entrails. The heart, liver, and gizzard should be put in a plastic bag if you want to save them. Field dressing your bird allows the body to cool down as fast as possible. However, you may want to have your turkey weighed before you dress it.

You can clean turkeys much like you do ducks, geese, chickens, and pheasants. The two main methods are plucking and skinning.

Pluck a turkey the same way you would pluck a chicken. The advantage of plucking is that you leave the skin on which keeps the bird from drying out while being cooked. Dipping the bird in scalding water helps feather removal. The disadvantages of plucking are that it takes more time than skinning and is messier.

Skinning a turkey is cleaner and faster, but the meat may dry out when cooked. You may want to wrap a skinned turkey in foil or put it into a baking bag during cooking. Larding the bird's breast with strips of bacon will also reduce drying during cooking.

There are various methods of skinning a turkey. Here is one way:

1. Hang the turkey by both feet at chest level, keeping the feet at least a foot apart.
2. If you want the beard saved, remove it by grasping it as close to the body as possible, give it a half-twist, then sharply pull it away from the breast.
3. Remove the tail fan by cutting the skin away from the tail.
4. Cut off the wings at the elbow or second joint.
5. Grasp the skin near the tail and begin pulling it down. Work the skin off around the wings and pull it down to the neck.
6. Cut off the neck and the skin. The feathers and head should come off in one piece.
7. Open the body cavity and remove the entrails, if the bird has not already been field dressed. Be sure to remove all lung material from the backbone, as it spoils fast.
8. Cut off the legs where the scaled and feathered sections meet. Then, the turkey is ready for cooking or freezing.

Wild turkeys are cooked the same as domestic turkeys, but wild birds will not be as fat.

## Cooking it up

In many ways, wild turkey tastes like domestic turkey purchased in the store. The main difference is that they tend to be less-moist than store bought birds. Techniques that you can try to retain moisture in your turkey include:

- Cook in a covered kettle following the manufactures directions for domestic turkey, approximately 12 minutes per pound.
- Roast you turkey in a commercial oven bag or "brown-in-bag", again following manufactures suggestions.
- Remove the legs, thighs, and wings and boil for stock. Partially freeze the breast and slice into  $\frac{1}{2}$  to  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch slices. Dip slices in egg batter, roll in flour, corn-meal, or cracker crumbs, add seasonings and fry in medium hot butter or margarine for five minutes to each side.

### Smoked Turkey Pitats

- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup celery, chopped
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup bell pepper, chopped
- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup onion, chopped
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup grapes, halved, or pineapple chunks
- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup parsley, chopped
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup cubed smoked turkey

#### *Dressing*

- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup yogurt
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup light mayonnaise
- $\frac{1}{2}$  tsp. cumin
- $\frac{1}{2}$  tsp. curry
- $\frac{1}{2}$  tsp. Spike (an all purpose salt free seasoning)

Mix dressing and add to other ingredients. Let stand in refrigerator for at least 2 hours. Mix again. Fill halved, open pita bread with mixture. Garnish with halved cherry tomatoes.

### Roast Wild Turkey and Stuffing

- 1 10 lb. Turkey and giblets
- 10-12 slices of dried bread, crumbled
- 2 tsp. celery salt
- 1 tsp. nutmeg
- 4 tbasp. chopped parsley
- Salt and pepper to taste
- $\frac{1}{4}$  tsp. ground mace
- 2 tsp. chopped pecans
- 4-5 hard-boiled eggs, chopped
- $1\frac{1}{2}$  cup chopped mushrooms
- $\frac{1}{4}$  lb. Butter
- 1 lg. onion, chopped fine
- $\frac{2}{3}$  to 1 cup sherry wine

Parboil giblets, chop fine. Add bread crumbs. Blend in seasonings. Add pecans, eggs and giblets. Sauté mushrooms in  $\frac{1}{2}$  the butter. Combine mushrooms, onions, and bread mixture, moisten with enough sherry to stick together.

Stuff the turkey and roast at 325 degrees for  $2\frac{1}{2}$  hours, basting occasionally. Serves 8-10.



# Further reading

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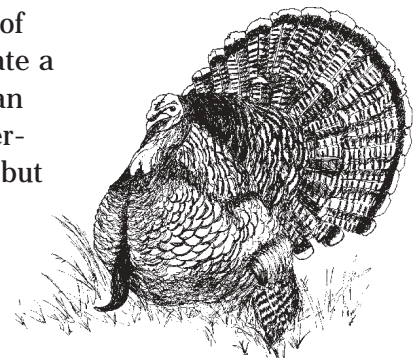
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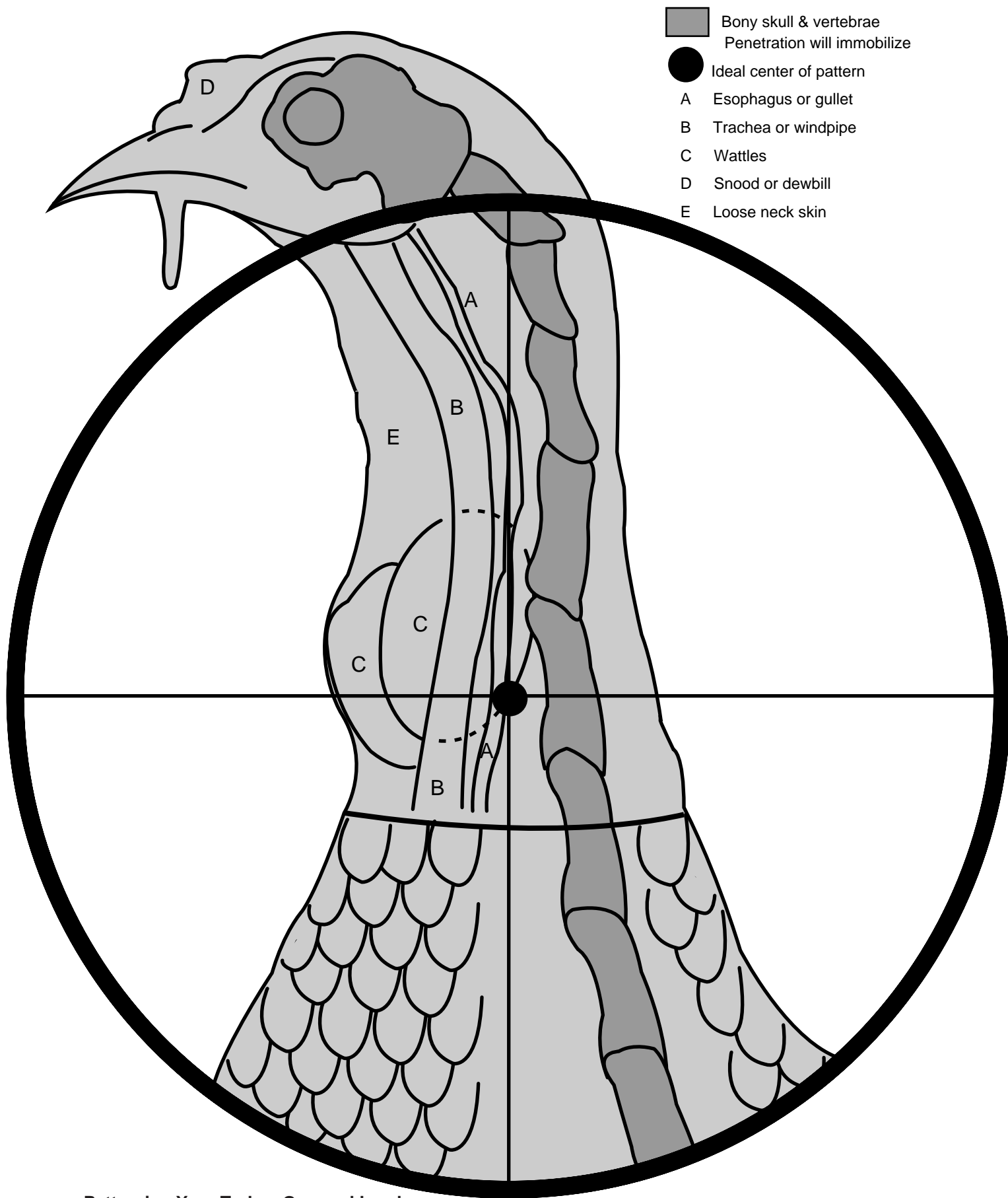
# Ten Commandments of Turkey Hunting Safety

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Veteran turkey hunter, Don Garver of the Illinois Department of Conservation, has developed 10 commandments for turkey hunters. He calls them his 10 commandments for staying alive. Some of these tips were given in previous segments as well, but they are worth repeating:

1. Don't ever attempt to approach closer than 100 yards to a gobbler. The hen or gobbler you hear often will be a hunter. He may call so proficiently and realistically that he sounds even better than a real turkey.
2. Never select a calling site with your back to a tree that is smaller than the width of your shoulders. Small trees won't hide slight visible movements of your hands or shoulders that may look like part of a turkey to a hunter stalking your calls. Use that tree to protect your back where you can't see.
3. Never jump and turn suddenly because you hear a turkey close behind you. That turkey behind you could turn out to be the barrel of a shotgun exploding at you. Wait until the bird walks where you can see it or call it back later.
4. Never select a calling site that doesn't allow at least 40 yards visibility in all directions, 75 yards visibility is even better. Either hunt on the top of a ridge where you can see down both sides or hunt at least 40 yards down the slope of a ridge. Good turkey calls may bring in unskilled hunters.
5. Never stalk a turkey. The idea is to call a gobbler to you. If you have tried to call a gobbler to you don't ever attempt to move closer. If it's a gobbler, he will probably see you. If it's a hunter, he may shoot you.
6. Don't use a gobbler call. When you shake a gobbler call, your hand can look like a turkey's head and that gobbler call may attract hunters.
7. Don't think because you're fully camouflaged that you're totally invisible. You're plenty visible to both turkey and hunter when you move even slightly. Sitting perfectly still will kill more turkeys than all the camouflage you can wear, and sitting still won't get you shot. Turkeys always see you. The movement is what panics them.
8. Never wear red, white or blue clothing—not even undergarments of those colors. Red is the color many hunters count on to differentiate a gobbler's red waddles from the blue colored hen's head. White can look like a snowball head of a gobbler. Leave those white handkerchiefs at home. Blue is the principle color of a hen turkey's head, but this color is found on a gobbler's head as well.
9. Never assume what you hear or answers you is a turkey.
10. Don't try to hide so well that you can't see what's happening.





### Patterning Your Turkey Gun and Load

To see how well your turkey gun and load pattern, copy this target and place it on a board at no more than 40 yards from where you plan to fire your gun. Then fire several loads at the turkey's head and neck each time counting the number of holes in the vital area (immobilization area). Six or more pellets in the vital area indicate a killing pattern. The ideal center of pattern is where the fleshy and feathered portion of the neck meet. Become familiar with the relative size of the turkey by patterning your gun at 25, 35, and 40 yards. Never shoot at a turkey beyond 40 yards.





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