

Turkey Hunting

A Pro's Secrets

story by
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Now that deer season is nearly over. I can put away the rifle and take a quick breath before launching headlong into turkey season. I burned too many turkey tags last season and I am in need of some professional help. I called on turkey hunting legend, Ray Eye, his insights and tips help hundreds of turkey hunters each season; novice or seasoned turkey hunter alike.

Eye cut his teeth hunting Missouri Ozark turkeys back in the 1970s; he took to turkey hunting becoming somewhat of a local legend. Other states had turkeys so he traveled to hunt and compete in turkey calling contests, all the while the legend of Ray Eye grew.

He has hunted in nearly every state that has a turkey population and every species from Easterns to the Ocellateds of Mexico. Today Eye's role has become that of a teacher – teaching hunters how to take more turkeys. Whether it is through his newest book *Chasing Spring*, DVDs, or one of his seminars, when your bread and butter comes from putting a turkey in front of hunter, you need to know the turkeys – as well as they know themselves and you can bet when the chips are down and a turkey has to be taken Eye will be holding four aces.

His knowledge didn't come from a book or magazine, but instead from being in the turkey woods not just during turkey season, but all year long. Eye follows the turkeys; watching, listening, and filming the birds.

What is Eye's secret? How does a professional consistently drop the hammer on birds? Here's a few of Eye's thoughts and tips.



Ray Eye working a Kansas Longbeard.

1. DARE TO BE DIFFERENT

“Turkey hunting has changed. Turkey densities are much higher than when I first started hunting turkeys. There’s more competition not just with other hunters but with the hens too, hunters must change the way they hunt, be willing to try something else a little off beat.” says Eye.

2. LEARN THE TURKEY’S HABITS

Eye recommends knowing the turkey’s haunts, not just when they come off the roost but later in the morning, as well. “If you bump a bird off the roost or somehow your bird disappears you need to know where and when the birds will be hanging out later in the morning.”

3. ROOSTING – A PRO’S SECRET

Eye’s roosting tactic, “I want to be the last thing he hears when he flies up to the roost and the first thing the next morning when he wakes up.” Eye recommends setting up tight and on the same side the gobbler flew into the roost.” “I want to know where he flew up from and which limb he is roosting on.” Setting up tight on roosted birds means a silent approach back to the spot he flew up to the tree.

4. CALLING IS EVERYTHING

Which leads us to calling, Eye makes no apologies for his calling style – some call it aggressive, “The days of yelping three times and not calling for 30 minutes are over.” As stated earlier the dense turkey population has made it more difficult even for the hens to get an old gobbler’s attention. “If a real hen only yelped three times and waited for the gobbler to respond to her she would never get bred.” explains Eye. “When you are in the turkey woods, listen to the hens’ calls, mimic what they are doing with your calling, but put more inflection or feeling in your calls, sound like a desperate hen, convince a gobbler you need his undivided attention.”

5. DIFFERENT TYPES OF CALLS

Eye recommends using a variety of types of calls. “Learn to call and don’t be afraid to use them. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain. A turkey hunter’s most valuable tool is



Fun and games, but Eye takes hunting seriously. These birds were taken on one of Eye’s media hunts.



Eye guides some of the nation’s top outdoor writers. Here is Eye with Jim Spencer with Spencer’s bird on a Nebraska hunt.



Eye films turkeys year around. This gives him an edge to know the habits of the birds.

the call.” One of Eye’s deadliest calls is the gobbler yelp, which is similar to a hen’s yelp, but differs as the gobbler yelp’s cadence is somewhat slower and more drawn out.

6. THE BEST KEPT SECRET IN TURKEY HUNTING – THE GOBBLER YELP

“By learning how to use the gobbler yelp, aggressive purring and gobbler cutting the hunter challenges the gobblers especially late spring, or when they are with hens. The gobbler yelp can be compared to the use of strutting decoys so popular today, the same effect I have had for 40 years with gobbler yelping.” says Eye.

7. CRACKING THE PECKING ORDER CODE

When the gobblers play hard to get and won’t answer the call, Eye takes the role of Mother Nature and begins calling the hens using the pecking order trick. “Every bird in the flock has a place in the pecking order. Each turkey recognizes another bird of their flock and if a new turkey suddenly appears (with your calling) the birds, especially the dominant hen, will come to investigate where this new hen fits into the social pecking order. This gets the hens all worked up the hens dragging the gobbler in tow.

8. A TURKEY IS A TURKEY

Eye approaches every species the same way. “A turkey is a turkey. I use the same tactics to call a Rio in Texas as I do an Eastern in Massachusetts or an Osceola in Florida” exclaims Eye. Though Eye believes turkey hunters in the west have an advantage over other hunters, “These hunters don’t use the term call shy.”

9. THE CALL SHY MYTH

Eye chuckles at the term call shy, “To think a turkey will get spooked by another turkey’s call is silly. This is the way turkeys communicate. The term call shy should be renamed to ‘people pressure’ because in reality this is what is happening. Let’s look at it like this; for the past four or five months the turkey has had very little encounter with humans. As spring arrives all of the sudden the mushroom hunters and turkey hunters are traipsing through the woods. This is what shuts down turkeys, not calling to them.”

10. GIVING THE TURKEY WHAT THEY WANT

This said Eye does believe some gobblers will respond to a particular sounding call better than others. For example, while ending an unsuccessful morning hunt in northern Missouri, Eye was asked to tune his hunting partner’s box call. Eye began the task of tuning the call not much different than a musician tunes an instrument, A few turns of the screw of the box call and Eye was satisfied, as was a gobbler that interrupted Eye as he tried finished tuning the call. Eye and his hunting partner had 30 minutes of legal hunting time left in the day (in Missouri you must stop hunting at 1:00 pm). The two men headed toward the gobbling bird, found an idea setup and sat down. Calling again, the duo was greeted by not one but two gobblers. The gobblers wasted no time looking for these newly found “hens”. Eye called, the gobblers responded. Ten minutes later, Eye and his hunting partner scored a double on Missouri gobblers. “Those gobblers finally heard a hen sound they liked and responded.” explains Eye.

POSITIVE THINKING

Finally Eye advises, “Turkey hunting is a mind game. A positive attitude and positive thinking goes a long way to being successful in the turkey woods. Don’t over-think or over-evaluate hunting situations. Do not give into negative thinking and the myth of turkeys being call shy and lastly, call to the turkeys, this is by far the most effective method of harvesting a turkey.” •