

OUTDOORSUPDATE

OF THE OUTDOORS

Hunting Fowl: The Old, 'Run and Gun' Method

BY GARY HOWEY

Doesn't matter what type of outdoor activity you're into, heavy winds, cold, wet or snowy weather can put a damper on any outdoor activities before they get started!

This is especially true when it comes to spring turkey hunting, making a hunter think more about the nice warm bed he's in than getting up and heading out after turkeys in fowl weather! Calling spring turkey when it's cold and damp can be a tough job, but don't think all turkeys will hole up during these types of weather conditions as there are always a few toms out there hoping to get lucky and stumble into a receptive hen!

Fowl weather makes our team revert to what we refer to as aggressive turkey hunting tactics.

More than likely this method isn't something that you may not have heard a whole lot about.

You've probably seen TV shows or videos where the hunter makes a few calls, getting an immediate response, a gobble, he sets down in one spot for a couple of minutes and then bird magically appears! Those doing these shows don't need to look around a whole lot to locate the birds, because they're in an area they've been hunted many times or they're hunting near to a feeder on familiar land.

If you're hunting in one area, an area you've hunted for years, you've had a lot of time out there, learning the birds patterns, where they roost and feed, you're going to know exactly where they are!

Most of our hunting is done in areas that we may have never seen before. We arrive the day before the hunt, scouting as time allows, but there are times when our schedule puts us into an area after dark and under these conditions, scouting isn't going to happen.

This is where we revert to our aggressive turkey hunting methods. On opening morning, we're in the field well before daybreak. It's

seems to be an area that should hold turkeys or an area we've had turkeys gobble back at us when we used a locator call. We'll start our hunt by jumping from one ridge line to another calling with our locator calls, using our owl, crow or predator calls trying to get an old gobble to shock gobble.

When doing this, you don't want to travel along the very top of the ridges, because a turkey's sharp eyes will pick you out against the skyline and once that happens, you're toast and you've spooked the birds so you might just as well find another hunting area. . You'll need to travel just below the ridge line, high enough so you can see and hear what's going on below you, but not high enough so that you're silhouetted against the skyline.

If we don't get an answer, we'll use our binoculars, glassing the valley below us as we work our way along the ridges, trying to spot the birds when they pitch down from the roost. Once we've located a gobble, we'll set up and call aggressively. If the bird is close, we'll start with a muffled putt and purr, increasing velocity as the tom responds. If the bird is farther away, we go loud and long. Not so loud to spook the bird, but loud enough so the tom knows you're there.

My hunting partner and I have taken over 35 toms (Eastern, Merriam, Rios and Hybrids) using this methods many of them some of our largest birds.

To do this, we've had to compete with other hens as well as several toms. By calling aggressively for up to a half-hour, we've pulled birds in from long distances.

Many times when the tom hangs up, refusing to come closer, we'll work on his hen. We'll call loud, sounding like a boisterous hen trying to draw her tom away. You'd be surprised how this will drive the mama or boss hen wild. On many occasions, we've had an old hen walk or run over get to the loud mouth hen making all the noise, trying to take her boyfriend away. We've had the boss hen break away from the tom and once he's realized his hen had wandered off, leaving him out there alone, it forces the tom to come with her, generally bringing the tom into gun range.



TEAM OUTDOORSMEN ADVENTURES PHOTO

The Run and Gun method will help you to tag a turkey even in the "fowlest" of weather. These two birds taken with one shot helped to fill his two South Dakota tags while hunting in South-Central South Dakota on a rainy day with heavy winds.

When hunting aggressively, you need to make sure that all your bases are covered; you may have to carry numerous calls. With me, this can mean as many as a dozen diaphragm calls as well as slates, box calls and push button yelpers.

Never fail, on certain days the birds will respond or talk to one particular call and not respond to the call we're using. If you're unable to get a turkey to respond, you're hunting blind, this is when you need to try another call so be prepared and bring along a good assortment of calls.

Camouflage is also an important part of the equation! When it happens, that big tom responds, you may not have a whole lot of time to duck into a place to "blend" into. This is why we mix and match camouflage patterns allowing us to blend into most terrains. A wood pattern all-purpose camo works great for the areas we hunt. We'll wear the same pattern camo on our turkey vests, face-masks, caps and have it covering our shotguns as it helps us to become a part of the terrain. When we're hunting late season, we'll go with dark camo on the bottom and lighter on the top allowing us to blend in with the grass that's greening up as well as the tree we're set up against.

We feel that our shotguns also need to be covered, if not, they'll stick out like a sore thumb so we cover them up.

I use a Benelli semi-automatic shotgun full or extra full choke while my partner goes with a Benelli pump both using the Mossy Oak camo pattern. Mine came camouflaged when I bought it and my partner camouflaged his with camo tape making them fit well into any area we're hunting.

Since we're using the walk and talk method where we move from ridge to ridge and call or as we call it, "the run and gun method", we need to travel light and those big full body decoys banging against every thing, just doesn't cut it. The last several years we've switched to lighter collapsible decoys, they're easy to transport and look good on the ground.

We generally use a couple of hens and a jake, but when my partner and I double up, we might have four hens and two jakes. I like to have the decoys set up so they'll move from side to side in a wind, as this gives the spread a little movement. With the wind we hunt in, there are times when a decoy can literally fly off, so we set up our decoys low to the ground and use a stick peg in the ground on either side of the tail,

which allow the decoy a little movement, but not enough where heavy winds will pick it up off the grounds. We set our decoys up with the jake off to my left at approximately 30 yards as I'm right handed and my partners jake is set off to the right as he's left handed. Dominant toms will generally approach the jake, trying to intimidate him or kick the tar out of him before having his way with the hens. By setting up the way we do, we have all bases covered no matter what side of us the tom goes to; we'll have good clear shooting lanes. Of course, we cover each other just in case a shot goes astray, not dumping the bird with the first shot.

As far as shells we use, we feel the more BB's the better, so a Winchester 5 or 6 shot extended range load works best for us. Both of our shotguns shoot 3 & 3 1/2 " shells, so we can reach out a good distance, but we still like to put the tom out about 25-30 yards as too many birds are wounded by taking overly long shots.

Even though we're using full choked shotguns with extended range loads, we still need to make a killing shot, which on a turkey is a shot to the head or neck area where it only takes one or two BB's to put them down for good. A body shot will not only destroy

the meat you're hunting for and the majority if the time you'll end up wounding the bird as their feathers act like a bullet proof vest, slowing down and absorbing the pellet, keeping them from penetrating into the vital organs. You may still get the bird, if you've are in shape and can run great distances, but a wounded turkey can out run and fly long distances and may suffer a long agonizing death.

By using aggressive calling tactics, covering ground, hunting smart and shooting well you won't need excellent condition to take a gobble.

Let's be honest, how many times do you choose a weekend to hunt gobblers that are perfect? Not many, so try hunting aggressively and you'll find that your Thanksgiving supper could be wild turkey, not ham like it's been so many years before!

Gary Howey, Hartington, Neb., is the President of Outdoorsmen Productions LLC and the Producer/Host of the Outdoorsmen Adventures television series that airs throughout the upper Midwest on Fox affiliates. For more outdoor information and show segments, go to www.outdoorsmneadventures.com

TROPHY SPOTLIGHT



PHOTO: CAPTAIN NORM'S

Marty Schmidt caught this 9-pound, 9-ounce walleye on March 29.

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