

OF THE OUTDOORS | GARY HOWEY

# Searching For Spring Turkeys

BY GARY HOWEY  
Hartington, Neb.

The 2012 spring turkey season has been going on for several weeks in South Dakota and Nebraska; with our Team Outdoorsmen Adventures members doing well. I've been out a couple of times this spring where, Team member Larry Myhre tagged a great Tom and I was able to get on it all film.

Unfortunately, I hadn't been able to convince a mature bird into range and spent one Saturday afternoon scouting some of my old hunting territories, which in the past had held birds. Jumping from one area to another, I glassed each, seeing birds at all of the locations.

There was one problem, where the birds were located was in the most open, windiest and impossible to get to locations that there was no way I could get within calling or listening distance. I continued on, hoping to locate an area where I could at least get within a half mile of a bird.

As I panned my fourth and final location, one where I'd taken a nice bird several years ago. The bottom, which had been the best spot as it allowed the birds to get out of the wind. It ran along a small stream, was well protected from the howling winds, but much to my dismay, there wasn't a single bird, hen or Tom down below. I scanned the surrounding fields with my binoculars, thinking the birds could be on the neighbor's ground, within calling distance.

That's when I spotted it, a lone Tom working along the ridgeline, heading east into the neighbor's tree line. I watched as it disappeared into an adjacent valley, re-locating farther west, where I hoped to get a better view of that side of the property. There they were! Two more big Toms in full strut doing their best to try and impress the four hens that were feeding along the ridge line just below them.

The Toms were having a tough time strutting as the gale force winds which were howling across the hillside, raising havoc with their tail feathers.

With the sun beginning to slide low in the western sky and no way at this time way to get near them, I decided to head for the shed and devise a plan that could work on another day.

The following Sunday, I was at home listening to the wind whipping through the trees, trying to come up with a plan allowing me to get into the area where I'd seen the birds quietly and into position without being seen or heard.

If the birds would be hanging out in the same location they'd been earlier in the week, I'd be busted coming into the tree line and if they were down along the creek, I didn't know if my calls could reach them because of the strong north winds.

Oh well nothing ventured, nothing gained, so I loaded up the Ranger and headed out.

As I made my way down the road, I did a quick mental check of my gear. Shotgun, check! Camo vest, check! Face mask, check! Shells, check! Decoy, check!



PHOTO: OUTDOORSMEN PRODUCTIONS  
This hybrid Tom turkey was taken by columnist Gary Howey during the 2012 Nebraska spring turkey season.

Calls, check, man I was ready!

I pulled in the south lane, unloaded the four-wheeler and proceeded down the narrow winding trail, which angled northward a half mile towards the tree line.

I'd chosen to use the Ranger to get me into the site as most of the farmers in the area used them, with the birds accustomed with the sound and a half mile talk with to me, dragging all my gear and a possibly a turkey back didn't really sound like too great an idea.

Nearing a group of cedar trees running along the fence line, I was startled by a group of five deer that broke from the trees and proceeded to blow right through the area I was planning to hunt, not good, as wild critters rely on each other and when a group of five wide eyed deer come charging through, chances are pretty good that whatever is in the area is now on full alert.

Creeping along the fence line, I knelt down to use one of my locator calls, (Owl, predator, or crow calls) hoping to get a shock gobbler from any Toms near by.

The sound of my crow call resonated through the valley, wait for it, wait for it, Nothing. Rats, not good.

I moved a little closer to the outside edge of the trees when a crow answered my call, nice try I thought to myself, there's nothing going to answer as I'd already tried it, when three gobblers came from the second row of trees brining me back to reality.

There I was along a bare fence line within shouting distance of three birds, I needed to do something quickly or get busted in the open. I headed for the first tree large enough for me to lean against, dropped my excess gear and put "Gertrude" my trusty hen decoy out

about 10 yards off to my right

Back at the tree, I set up; dug through my vest for my Roost'em slate, box call and mouth diaphragm calls. They had to be here in one of the "ten" different pockets of my vest, and as I frantically rummaged through my vest, I wondered, where the heck were my diaphragm calls, they're always in my vest, when I realized that on the last hunt, when I was logging the camera, I'd taken them out of my vest and left them in the vehicle as the plastic boxes they were in clacked together.

Well, what a fine how do you do, now what do I do?

As any turkey hunter can tell you that a turkeys eyes are so keen they can spot a man blink at 40 yards and in order to get a Tom to come out of strut and extend his neck and head, which gives the hunter a good the opportunity for a clean shot, I feel a diaphragm call is essential when the bird is in close, as the use of other calls requires the hunter to move.

Oh well, you got to do what you've got to do.

I gently stroked the box call and not far away, the Toms gobbled simultaneously, down below, but not where I could see them.

Grabbing my slate, I gave a soft purr and just below the trees north of me, all three birds double gobbled.

Putting down my call, I shouldered my twelve gauge, waiting for the birds to appear. On they came, through the trees, one, two and then a third bird, all Toms. At the distance they were at and the tall vegetation they were coming through, it was hard for me to judge the size of the birds.

The second bird was taller than the other birds and white headed, a good in-



SUBMITTED PHOTO  
Patrick & Eric Hoelsing of Hartington, Neb., are pictured with the two turkeys they took while hunting the 2012 Nebraska spring turkey season in northeast Nebraska. Erik's first turkey, on the right was a Merriam while his brother Patrick's was a Rio/Hybrid.

dicator he was a mature bird and seemed to be the largest of the group, but until the bird strutted allowing me to see his fan or his beard, I wasn't sure which one was the mature bird.

Gertrude, my decoy, was off to my right and wobbling a bit back and forth in the wind, which instantly alerted the lead bird. He must have seen something he didn't like as instead of gobbling and strutting he started moving off to my right at a much quicker pace.

As he cleared the grass, I could see his beard and knew he was the one I wanted to take. This is when, if I had my diaphragm call, I'd do the warning putt. Since I'd left it behind, I putted using my mouth in an attempt to imitate a warning putt. It may not have been the prettiest putt, but it worked as his head came up and I unloaded on him while the other two birds vacated the area, heading off for parts unknown.

My first shot at 40 yards rocked the big bird, but not enough to put him down for the count and as he went airborne winging towards the property to the east, I put a second load of six shot into him, bringing him down hard, allowing me to fill my first Nebraska spring turkey tag.

After several trips to the field where I came home empty handed, this twenty-two and a half pound hybrid Tom will be remembered, not only for the short hunt it took to take the bird, but one that will help me to remember on future hunts to make sure that I have "all" of my gear before I hit out into the field.

As any spring turkey hunter can tell you, not all hunts may work out this well and end so quickly. Each spring is different and if you spend much time in the turkey woods, you'll need to be patient as Toms, especially those with hens can test the most seasoned hunter.

No matter what your doing in the outdoors this time of the year, it's a great way to spend a day or two and enjoy all Mother Nature has to offer.

Gary Howey, Hartington, Neb., is a former hunting and fishing guide, the President of Outdoorsmen Productions, Producer/Host of the Outdoorsmen Adventures television series Co-Host of Outdoor Adventures radio. More information on the outdoors can be found at [www.outdoorsmenadventures.com](http://www.outdoorsmenadventures.com).

## Briefs: No-Boating Zone Enacted On Big Sioux River In Sioux Falls

PIERRE — To protect the public, Gov. Dennis Daugaard has enacted a No-Boating Zone on a short section of the Big Sioux River, effective at 8 a.m. on Monday, May 7, 2012.

The No-Boating Zone will be in effect for a portion of the Big Sioux River located in the city of Sioux Falls, starting at the Minnesota Avenue bridge and continuing downstream to the Cliff Avenue bridge.

The no-boating order will be in effect until rescinded by the Governor.

The city of Sioux Falls is currently working on repair of its sanitary sewer system between Minnesota and Cliff avenues. The construction may result in hazardous boating conditions on that stretch of the Big Sioux River. As a precaution, Sioux Falls officials requested temporary closure on that portion of the Big Sioux River.

State law gives the Governor authority to prohibit or restrict recreational use or navigation on any portion of a river, lake or stream in order to protect the public peace, health, or safety, said Jeff Vonk, Secretary of the South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks.

A violation of the public waterway restriction is a Class 2 Misdemeanor, punishable by up to 30 days in jail, a fine of \$500, or both.

## Palisades State Park To Perform Road Maintenance

GARRETSON — Palisades State Park near Garretson will be conducting road maintenance May 7-11, 2012, weather permitting.

"We are finishing the chip seal project that was started last fall," said Travis Theilen, District Park Supervisor at Palisades State Park. "We plan to complete the sweeping in one day and apply a seal coating the following day."

Some areas of the park will remain open during the sweeping, but the roads and camping pads must be closed during the sealing process to allow the oil to cure and dry.

Park visitors can contact Palisades State Park at 605-594-3824 for more information.

## Turtles And Frogs To Be Displayed at Aquarium

LINCOLN, Neb. — The Ak-Sar-Ben Aquarium Outdoor Education Center will host a display of turtles and frogs on the first weekend of each month this summer, starting May 5-6.

Educators from the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission will show and discuss Nebraska's common frogs and turtles from noon to 4 p.m. The public is invited to see and touch these animals up close, while learning how they survive in the wild.

The aquarium is located in Schramm Park State Recreation Area, south of Gretna. For more information, call 402-332-3901.

## TROPHY SPOTLIGHT



PHOTO: CAPTAIN NORM'S  
Mike Hood caught this 40-pound Flathead Catfish on the James River.

## Somsen

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he would be ready for the 2011 season.

Rather than risk further injuring his right elbow, Somsen instead chose to sit out the entire 2011 season, following the recommendations of the SDSU training staff.

New pitching coach at the time, Tyler Oakes, took over a staff that did not include Somsen, though the pitcher remained active in the program. "The biggest thing for him was that he continued to work hard with the training staff," Oakes said this week. "Maybe that extra time helped him get back quicker to where he is now, it's hard to say."

"It was just important for him to stick with the process, and now it's been paying off."

There was still some lighting throwing for Somsen last year, but it was a whole other obstacle to get himself ready for live action during SDSU's pre-season workouts this spring, he admits. As if the baseball gods were

testing him, Somsen's first start back this season for the Jacks was at Murray State — where his trouble began two years earlier.

"I usually don't get nervous, but I was definitely nervous being back there," he said. "That's where it all went south. It sounds weird, but I was pretty nervous."

Those around him may not have picked up on it, because Somsen assumes almost a completely different attitude on the mound. He's out there to win, Oakes said.

"He's very competitive; that's one of his best qualities," the second-year pitching coach said. "He takes the mound with a good approach and he expects a lot out of himself."

"Now, you can see that he's back in it mentally, and that old form is back."

Proof that he is back to his old ways, Somsen's last start was a dominating one against Oral Roberts, the 14-time defending Summit League champion. Somsen's line?

Eight innings, no runs, two hits and eight strikeouts. It was his first win in three years.

One good thing that resulted in his elbow issues was a new pitch he developed. Sensing a need to have a third 'out' pitch, Somsen experimented with a cut-fastball — a "cutter."

"It showed my freshman year. I would get to two strikes and hitters would sit curveball, because that's the only other one (pitch) I had," he said. "I was just messing around with grips, and one of our trainers said I should try a cutter."

"I'm glad I did; it's probably my best one right now."

Still, he remains cautious with his elbow, though Somsen maintains that his unique delivery — straight over the top — does not cause added strain on the arm.

It's to the point where he feels comfortable enough taking on extra work load this summer.

Somsen said he will be playing for the Fayetteville (S.C.) SwampDogs of the Coastal Plains League, a 14-team wood bat league that spans across North Carolina, South Carolina

and Virginia.

Two years removed from surgery, Somsen is indeed back with a vengeance.

"With everything that had gone on and hadn't worked out well, I'm glad that I stuck it out," Somsen said. "We've got a great group of guys up here. Without them and all that support, I'm not sure I'd be still playing."

"Now I feel like I have everything back, finally."

You can follow Jeremy Hoek on Twitter at [twitter.com/jhoek](http://twitter.com/jhoek)

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