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# A TURKEY HUNTER'S HANDBOOK

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DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES  
DIVISION OF ENFORCEMENT  
Wild Turkey Hunter Education Program

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Cover photo by Dean Peterson

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## **FOREWARD**

The wild turkey's reputation among hunters is legendary. Wily, clever, smart, crafty, shrewd, and discerning are adjectives used to describe this largest of North American game birds. The hunter's challenge is embodied in an old Native American saying: "Any brave can kill a deer; it takes a chief to kill a turkey."

The turkey has the natural "equipment" to outmaneuver the vast majority of hunters. Respected turkey biologist Wayne Bailey, claims the wild turkey's eyesight is 10 times better than humans and their keen sense of hearing is about eight times better. In addition, these birds have no curiosity. Sudden movement or noise immediately sends them running (up to 30 m.p.h.) or flying (up to 55 m.p.h. in a glide) to parts unknown. Without question, hopeful turkey hunters have their work cut out for them.

Minnesota's wild turkeys are just as wary as their free-roaming ancestors that were trapped in other states and transplanted to Minnesota's southeast counties. They are likely to remain wild as long as there are annual hunting seasons. Although the objective of the turkey season is to provide recreation, hunting also serves to maintain the birds' wild nature.

This booklet has been prepared by the Minnesota Advanced Hunter Education Program, Division of Enforcement, Department of Natural Resources, for the education of Minnesota turkey hunters. The booklet presents the background and biology of Minnesota's wild turkeys, and provides information about hunting Minnesota's wild turkeys in a safe and responsible manner.

For more information call (612) 296-0890.

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## HISTORY OF WILD TURKEYS IN MINNESOTA

Minnesota's first turkey hunt in 1978 and those following would not have been possible without modern wildlife management techniques.

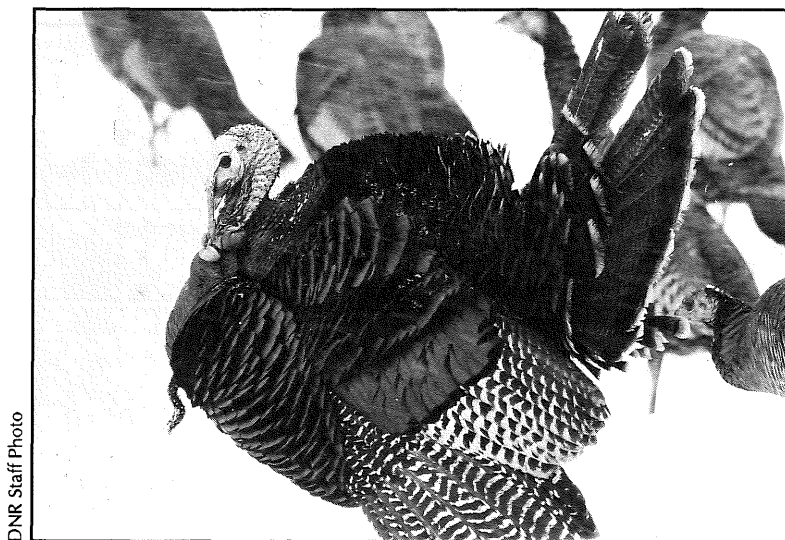
Historically, Minnesota was the northern edge of the wild turkey range. Birds occurred in limited numbers in southern Minnesota.

First attempts to re-establish wild turkey populations in Minnesota began in 1926 when 250 game-farm birds were released in Winona and Houston counties and, of all places, in the Minneapolis/St. Paul metropolitan area. These initial releases failed—as did later attempts involving several hundred more pen-raised birds.

From 1964 to 1968, the Conservation Department (as DNR was then called) tried a different approach. A swap of ruffed grouse, bear, and walleyes brought to Minnesota 39 turkeys trapped in Nebraska, Arkansas, and South Dakota. These wild transplants were released in the

Whitewater Wildlife Management Area. Between 1971 and 1973, an additional 30 wild-trapped birds from Missouri were transplanted to the Crooked Creek area of Houston County.

To date, the Minnesota turkey population has maintained itself despite predation, disease, and harsh winters. From the original transplants, the fall turkey population exceeded 15,000 birds by 1990. With continued natural range expansion and further trapping and transplanting of wild Minnesota birds, all the turkey habitat in Minnesota should contain wild turkeys within the next few years.

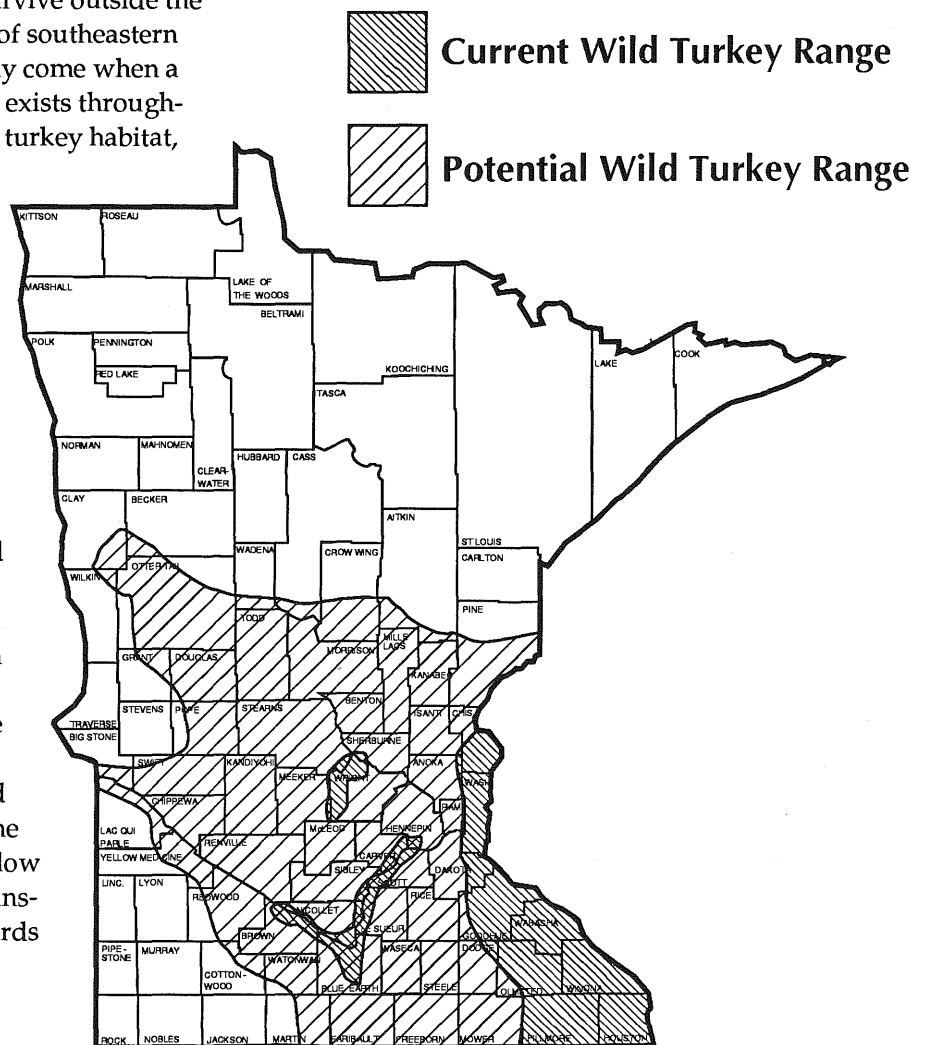


DNR Staff Photo

Wild turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*) tom.

Additional transplants will continue in other selected areas, since research has indicated that turkeys can survive outside the hardwood covered hills of southeastern Minnesota. The time may come when a stable turkey population exists throughout Minnesota's suitable turkey habitat, thus greatly extending turkey hunting zones.

Hunters with good intentions can hinder the transplanting of turkeys into some areas of Minnesota. They illegally release pen-raised turkeys into the wild. The pen-raised birds do not have the "wildness" inherent in true wild turkey and can spread diseases. Pen-raised birds may survive for a time, but they are not the same as true wild turkeys. Areas with game farm turkeys are placed low on the priority list for transplants, and pen-raised birds may have to be removed before a transplant takes place.



## WILD TURKEY CHARACTERISTICS

A large tom (male) wild turkey can weigh more than 27 pounds, stand three feet tall, and have a five foot wingspan. Wing primaries have distinct white bars with a light gray background. The tail feathers are almost black with rusty markings and buff-colored

tips. The tom's head is bald and blue—except during courtship. Then the skin becomes engorged with blood and turns red about the neck and reddish blue in the cheeks and white on top of the head. The legs are pinkish. A hen's head is sparsely covered with short brown feathers.

The turkey has a range of voices—the whistle of the young bird, the alarm "putt",

Sex and Age Characteristics		Other Visual Characteristics	
Characteristic	Hens (females)	Gobblers (males)	
Beards	occasionally (4%)	Regularly	
Droppings	looped, spiral, bulbous	longer, straight, Knob-like, J-shaped	
Breast Feathers	buff-colored tips	black tipped	
Spurs	none	yes	
Track Size	4 1/2" spread or less	often greater than 4 1/2" spread	
Gobble	never	frequently, especially in spring	
Head Adornments	none	snood, caruncles and wattles	
Head colors	gray to gray-blue	Bright turquoise blue to bright red to bright blue	

the soft "cluck" of the hen's tree call, the hen's "here I am" yelp, the "cackle" or fly down from the roost call of the hen, and the male's gobble.

There are several aging characteristics. Immature gobblers (jakes) usually have beards less than four inches long and spurs of less than one-half inch; their middle tail feathers are longer than the others; and they have sharp, pointed, primary wing feathers with indistinct, alternating, light and dark bars. Mature gobblers may have a beard more than one foot long, spurs one-half to two inches long, and tail feathers all of the same length. Hens lack spurs, and only four percent of hens have small beards.

Hunters soon discover that turkeys possess excellent eyesight and hearing. Some biologists claim turkeys can see 10 times better than humans and hear eight times better. Turkeys do not have three-dimensional vision, however, to see accurately, they must move their head back and forth, but they can easily detect directions, distance, size, shape, brightness, color, and intensity.

Wild turkeys range over extensive areas during the course of a year, requiring 500 to 2,000 acres of habitat comprised of mature hardwoods interspersed with agricultural lands. Extremely wary birds, wild turkeys stay in flocks so they have many eyes to spot danger.

Turkeys are powerful, adept fliers that can fly straight up if danger is approaching. Wild turkeys are not curious; any sudden movement or noise sends them running (at speeds up to 30 m.p.h.) or flying (up to 55 m.p.h.) to parts unknown. Pen-reared birds seldom exhibit these traits.

Wild turkeys are most active in the morning and roost in trees at sundown. As a general rule, adult gobblers flock by themselves, very rarely joining hens and poults.

When feeding, turkeys need to see well in all directions for security against predators. Woodland edges provide the most favored foraging areas. Turkeys tend to avoid areas of dense brush. A relatively open understory in mature oak-hickory woodlands allows turkeys to forage for nuts and berries more extensively and frequently. Wild turkeys prefer to roost at night in mature, open-branched hardwoods near hillsides. South- and east-facing slopes are preferred by turkeys for early sunlight and for shelter from northwest winter winds.

During nesting and brood-rearing seasons, wild turkeys require water daily and are rarely far from a water source. During other seasons, turkeys receive necessary water from the foods they eat.



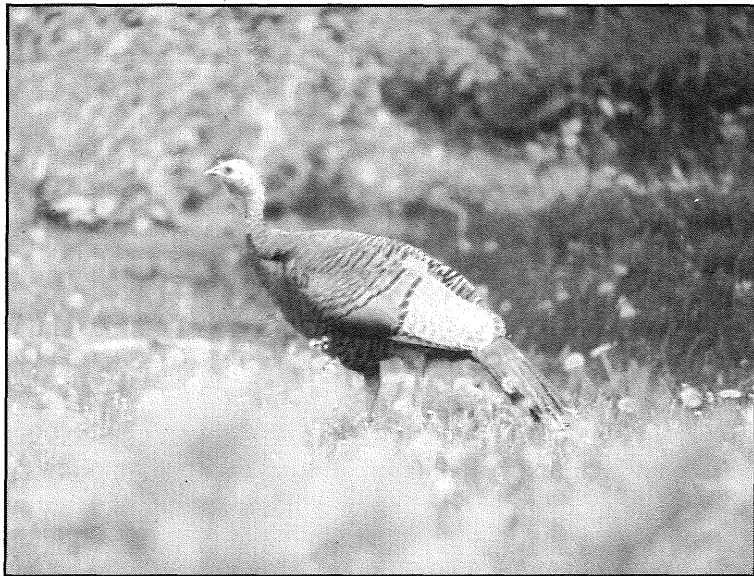
## COURTSHIP AND MATING

Courtship and mating, the most dramatic aspects of turkey behavior, begin early in April and continue until late May.

When displaying, the tom's loose skin under the chin (wattles) changes colors from red to blue and purple to white. The snood, a cone-like projection located just above the beak, elongates and swells during the display. Toms engage in "necking" contests with other toms, twining their necks together in a show of strength. The winner becomes a flock's dominant male.

Males develop a "breast sponge" during the breeding season. This padding of tissue, filled with oil and fat, apparently sustains the male during breeding season when he loses interest in eating. The sponge also serves as a display device—a protruding chest to attract hens. Head back, chest feathers puffed out, tail spread fan-like, the tom paces back and forth, sometimes taking several quick steps toward the female with his wings dragging the ground. Hens may leave the tom soon after being bred.

Photo by Dean Peterson



Wild turkey hen.

## NESTING

After a successful mating, the hen becomes secretive, slipping away to find a suitable nesting spot. Most hens engage in nesting by mid to late April. It is during this period, when the number of receptive hens decreases, that males become most susceptible to hunters imitating the call of a hen.

The nest is a slight depression scratched in the ground by the hen. It is usually located around the edges of old fields, along woodland roads and occasionally in hay fields.

Clutches average 10-12 eggs, and egg laying is completed in about 14 days. Hens normally cover the eggs with leaves when they leave the nest to forage. During the first days of incubation, the hen may abandon the nest if disturbed, or threatened by predators.

After about 28 days of incubation, all fertile eggs in the clutch hatch within a 24-hour period. Shortly after hatching, the new poults are led by the hen into a nearby field to feed on insects, a protein-rich food source. For four weeks, the poults are brooded on the ground until their primary (flight) feathers have developed.

Wild turkeys are voracious feeders. Young birds usually gain 10 to 15 pounds between June and December. Although more than a hundred items make up the wild turkey's diet, acorns and other native mast are preferred for its fall diet. Unfortunately, acorn crops in Minnesota are not dependable. Other staples include corn, grain, and alfalfa.

## **TURKEY MANAGEMENT**

Turkeys are well adapted to southeastern Minnesota's mixture of farmland and hardwood forest. The primary habitat, however, is the hardwood forest. Thus, an important consideration for any turkey management plan is proper management of the forest. Luckily, tree cover on steep slopes is important for erosion control as well as for turkeys. In addition, forest land has been purchased for use as state forests, wildlife management areas, and state parks. It is important to remember that big changes in land use will affect the wild turkey population.

Minnesota's biggest challenge to wild turkey survival is severe winter weather. Through starvation and predation of weakened turkeys, many turkeys perish during severe winters with deep, heavy snow. A dependable winter food source is important. Mast (forest tree nuts such as acorns) available during the fall and early winter months may become scarce during the late winter or may be covered by deep snow. In some years with greater than average snow depths, the sun may burn off southeast-facing slopes, exposing valuable food. During severe winters, standing corn food plots are among the few sources of food not covered by snow. The DNR and the Minnesota Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation establish hundreds of acres of corn food plots in the turkey range.

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## TURKEY HUNTING

Since Minnesota's wild turkey program began, a goal has been to provide a sufficient number of birds for hunting. Since turkey populations have expanded tremendously since the original transplants in 1964, the Minnesota Legislature granted the DNR authority to establish the state's first spring turkey season in 1978.

Like pheasants, turkeys are polygamous—each breeding tom services a large number of hens. Because a turkey population consists of nearly an equal number of both sexes, toms are definitely in surplus and can provide considerable hunting opportunities. In fact, once a turkey population is established, both sexes can be harvested.

During the spring mating season, toms can be selectively hunted. Using calls that sound like a seductive hen, hunters lure toms within range of a shotgun or bow and arrow.

In states with large turkey populations, hunting seasons are often held in the fall and spring. Fall hunts allow hunters to take birds of either sex and any age, similar to the ruffed grouse season. Minnesota, with an expanding population, has conducted spring gobble-only hunts to protect hens. This limitation ensures a large breeding nucleus. In areas

where Minnesota turkeys have saturated the available range, fall hunts began in October of 1990.

## HUNTING REGULATIONS

The spring turkey hunting season is set for the period when toms are gobbling. Gobbling normally begins several weeks prior to the first day of hunting and continues through the spring. Toms have been successfully called in as late as June. Gobbling activity is greatly affected by weather conditions, with the heaviest gobbling activity occurring on clear, calm mornings. Rain and strong winds reduce or eliminate most gobbling activity.

In the spring, hunting is allowed only from one-half hour before sunrise until noon to minimize disturbance of nesting hens. Most gobbling occurs early in the day. As gobbling activity subsides, hunters are more likely to move around in search of birds. This increases the chances of disturbing hens, which if pushed from nests may abandon their eggs.

The fall season allows hunting from one-half hour before sunrise to sunset.

Shotguns must be 20 gauge or larger, except for muzzle-loading shotguns, which must be 12 gauge or larger. Bows must be 40

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pound pull or greater, using arrows with legal broadheads. Turkeys are difficult to harvest, since the feathers and muscles protect the vital body organs.

Shot size is restricted to number four, five, or six. Most of the duplex loads on the market are illegal since they contain some shot sized larger than four. Because of the shot sizes, birds must not be shot on the wing. Shot size is restricted for safety reasons. (Turkey hunting safety will be discussed later.) A head shot is a must to bring down a turkey.

A successful turkey hunter must attach the license tag to the turkeys leg immediately after it is killed. The bird must be taken to a check station and registered. The attendant records the bird's weight and age, the location of the kill, and other information important to wild turkey management in Minnesota.

A person may not assist another turkey hunter in any way (including calling) unless the person has a license for the same season and zone.

During the fall hunt, males, females and poults may be harvested where there is an open season. Fall hunts are only held in areas where the turkey population is sufficient to allow the taking of either sex.

Party hunting is not allowed for wild turkeys; each hunter must harvest his or her own bird.

Also, the use of ATVs by licensed turkey hunters within the turkey hunting zones during hunting season is illegal.

**Hunting regulations may vary from year to year. Hunters should review the current Commissioner's Orders for complete and up-to-date regulations on turkey hunting.**



## TYPES OF TURKEY CALLS

Perhaps most important in preparing for a turkey hunt is development of calling skills. The best call is the one with which a hunter is most proficient, but many types are good. Turkey calls have been made out of every imaginable substance, including the wing bone of a turkey, and in a great variety of styles. Each style has its own combination of advantages.

DNR Staff Photo



Caller with box call.

The hinged box call is generally considered the easiest to use. It is a good choice for most first-time hunters. The sound is produced by merely scraping the hinged lid across the edge of the box. Disadvantages are that it requires the use of both hands and does not work if wet. Placing the box call in a loose plastic bag allows hunters to keep the call dry while operating it under wet conditions. There are many good models on the market. A new variety with a push dowel can be operated with one hand and can be fastened to a gun.

The friction striker consists of a flat surface over which a striker is pushed or

pulled. The flat surface of slate or aluminum is placed over a resonating chamber. Most strikers are wooden dowels with one slightly pointed end. Some newer models with plastic strikers work even when wet. This type of call also requires the use of both hands.

The diaphragm mouth calls are usually preferred by veteran hunters. They are the most versatile calls, but also the most difficult to master. They are unaffected by wet weather, allow the hunter to have both hands free to handle the gun, and can be used without making any discernible movement.

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## CALLING TECHNIQUES

There are several good ways to learn turkey calling, but reading about it is not one of them. Therefore, this discussion will be only a short introduction.

Beginners should keep several points in mind. Most experts believe it is better to call too softly than too loudly, to call too rarely rather than too frequently, and to perfect one or two calls rather than attempt some sound not yet mastered. Rhythm, or timing, can be more important than the actual quality of sound. Finally, remember that turkeys make a variety of sounds, many of which don't sound like anything on an instructional recording. Absolute perfection of tone is less important than the skill of reading the gobbler's response and adjusting the calling technique accordingly.

Spring hunting has two calls of supreme importance. The "cluck" call is a contented turkey sound. The "yelp" is the primary call of the spring turkey hunter. It imitates the "come hither, I'm ready" call of the hen. It is a simple high and low note slurred together, usually emitted in a series of three to five calls. These yelps can be muted or loud, slow and plaintive or stridently insistent. This call has many variations, including that of young and mature hens.

"Kee-kee-run" is the predominant fall hunting call. However, when a flock has been broken up, hunters should imitate sounds heard from lost turkeys.

Inexperienced hunters can use instructional recordings to learn the basics of calling. However, the use of electronic calls to actually call a turkey is illegal. Experienced hunters, and articles and books about turkey hunting can be good sources for learning more about turkey hunting.

## SCOUTING

Successful turkey hunting begins with careful scouting. Hunters going into turkey hunts "cold," without having spent at least a day or two scouting, put themselves at a great disadvantage.

While scouting, look for signs of turkey activity. Scratching, dusting spots, droppings, and tracks all indicate the presence of turkeys. In the spring, gobblers can be located by enticing them to answer a gobble produced by a call. Almost any noise may get them to sound off. This technique is most useful after the birds have roosted for the night. Remember to scout at times when other hunters are not out, so you don't interfere with their hunt and for safety reasons. Also remember not to disturb nesting hens in the spring.

The scouting trip is the best time to seek landowners' permission to hunt on private land. It is wise to review the Minnesota Trespass Law found in the all game synopses. Warm receptions are more likely when requests come well in advance of the season.



DNR Staff Photo

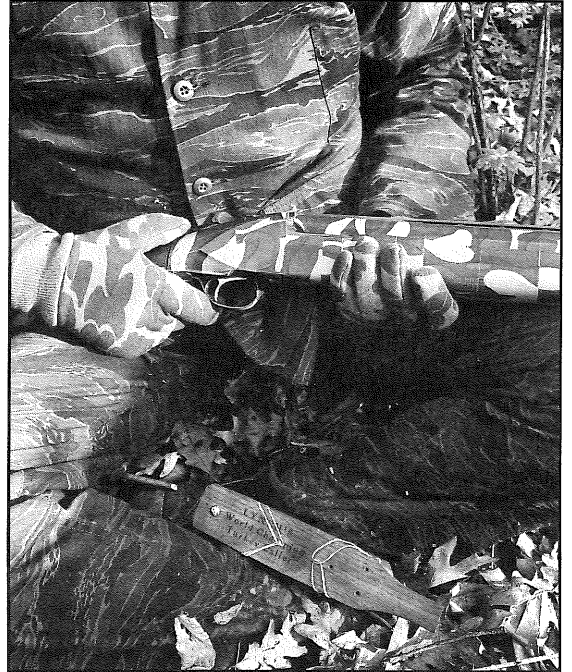
Scouting for turkey sign.

It is a waste of precious hunting time to seek a hunting spot once the season has started. Developing a good relationship with landowners is one of the best methods for finding birds. Many landowners will point out where they have seen birds most often.

## SPRING HUNTING

A spring turkey hunter is rewarded by experiencing the renewal of life outdoors. After a winter of cold and confinement to indoor activities, the hunter can once again experience the outdoors. Mother nature is renewing her world, from the budding trees and blooming flowers to the breeding plumage of her birds with the singing of their mating calls. It's a time when one feels "its great to be alive." Along with this, the spring turkey hunter who outwits a wily tom has much to be joyous about.

"Putting a gobbler to bed" is a technique that can greatly increase a hunter's chance of success. During the late afternoon or early evening the day before hunting, position yourself on a prominent ridge or in the middle of a valley. Gobble on your call. If a gobbler answers, try to pinpoint its location. Note prominent features around the location of the answering gobbler. Before first light the next morning, sit down no closer than 100 hundred yards from the gobbler's roost and wait for the legal shooting time. Then, call softly like a lovesick hen and get ready for action. "Putting the gobbler to bed" should be repeated each evening during a hunt. The technique doesn't always work, but is well worth the effort.



DNR Staff Photo

Complete camo and call—tools of the turkey hunter.

On nice days during mating season, it doesn't take much to make a gobbler sound off. Barking dogs, hooting owls, slamming car doors, and other sounds may trigger gobbling activity. If no gobblers sound off on their own, a light yelp might get them going.

Next comes the critical step. The hunter needs to listen to a couple of calls in order to locate a bird, then move as quickly and quietly as possible to a place where the bird can be



called. The selection of this site can make or break the hunt.

How close can a hunter get? Probably no closer than 100 yards—and 200 yards would be safer. If the bird hears or sees the hunter's approach, it will slip away unseen, remember the wild turkey is not curious. It is possible to approach closer in hilly terrain than in flatter areas.

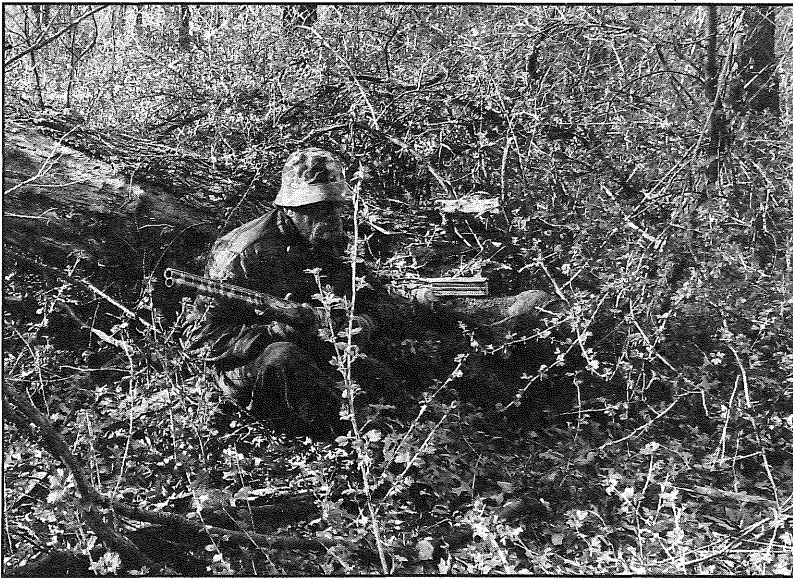
It is best to call a gobbler from the same elevation. Birds seem reluctant to move up or down, and may not cross natural obstructions

like streams or ravines. A gobbler might go to great lengths to reach a hen, but good hunters make it as easy as possible for the gobbler.

Turkeys can be hard to call across extremely open country, but very heavy cover makes for difficult shooting. Moderately thick cover with little understory is best.

Hunters attempting to call in a tom should place themselves in front of a large tree or rock to break up their outline and avoid being shot from behind. Camouflaged or at least dark, dull, forest-colored clothing is

essential. Don't forget the hands, face, and neck area. Also, since you are likely to be sitting on the ground, dark-soled boots are necessary. A ground pad or cushion extends the time a hunter can sit still. (It also helps keep you warmer and dryer.) Shiny gun barrels and other equipment may spook a bird. Special cloth socks and camouflage tapes are available for covering guns or bows. Be sure to have a clear area to aim and swing guns or bows.



DNR Staff Photo

Camouflage yourself entirely and sit in front of a large object.



Photo by Dean Peterson

Some turkey hunters use decoys successfully. Silhouette decoys are the safest.

Artificial turkey decoys are used successfully by some hunters. Silhouette decoys are safer than full-bodied decoys, since other hunters should more easily recognize the silhouette as not being a real turkey. Place the silhouette slightly to one side of you, with the decoy facing away from you. In this position, another hunter shooting at its silhouette or side would likely be shooting parallel to your position. If you hear another hunter approaching, use very human sounds to alert them to you, not a turkey sound. If they are close enough to be heard, they probably have already disrupted any turkeys in the area. Besides, being safe is more important than getting a shot at a bird.

Decoys look like turkeys, so to avoid danger while carrying one, enclose it in a wrap, either hunter orange or a complete cover of camouflage.

Decoys can attract more than that love sick tom. In addition to other hunters, decoys may attract natural turkey predators like hawks and owls, which could also spook a turkey.

If used properly and carefully, however, decoys may enhance the chances of bagging a tom.

The preceding techniques are among those that often work best, but variations are too numerous to write about here. If turkeys were predictable, turkey hunting would be less challenging.

## FALL HUNTING

The woods are different in the fall, both because of the weather and because others will be in the woods then. Fall is a high use season outdoors. There will be hunters of a variety of other species. There will be mushroom and ginseng gatherers, as well as hikers and campers who might not be present during a spring hunt. All users must attempt to avoid interference with each other.

Fall hunting is almost the exact opposite of spring techniques because either sex and any age bird is legal. "Divide and conquer" is the strategy most often used by fall turkey hunters. Once a flock of birds is located, a hunter rushes rapidly to scatter the flock in all directions. (Do not drive them away in the same direction.) Remember, safety first: unload or set down your gun before running. The young of the year can be called back to the spot from which they were flushed. The hunter selects a site in the center of the area from which the birds were scattered and calls the assembly sound. This is usually referred to as the "kee-kee-run." The hunter should try to duplicate the calls made by birds. The hunter should mimic the call of the "boss" or adult hen calling her young together.

It is legal to take an adult hen, but hunters should remember that the young



Fall brood.

brood flock depends on that adult to guide them through their first winter. Most experienced turkey hunters don't shoot the "boss" hen. If the hen does come to the hunter, she can be run off and the young can be called. However, the adult hen and the young are about the same size in the fall. It can also be difficult to distinguish between immature males (jakes) and molting hens.

Bagging a gobbler in the fall can be even more difficult than during the spring, since gobblers seldom call or respond to calls in the fall. Also, the gobbler's head and neck adornments, so prevalent in the spring, are faded in the fall, which can make it difficult to identify.

There are several methods utilized in fall turkey hunting. One is to locate a night roost and then scatter the turkeys just after dark. The following morning, before daylight, be set up in the midst of that area.

Another tactic is to locate and scatter a flock in the early morning. Move in early and listen for turkeys "talking" on the roost. Again, scatter, call and wait.

A hunter can quietly walk until a flock is located, then rush in and scatter the flock. Select a calling site in the center of where the turkeys were and then call them back.

Finally, for the more skilled and patient hunter, an ambush can be set up once a flock's travel habits have been determined by observation over several days.

## SHOOTING

Be absolutely sure your target is a turkey. In the spring, be absolutely sure your target is a tom turkey.

Shooting a bird on the ground with a shotgun should not be very tricky, yet this climactic point in the hunt should not be taken for granted.

The only proper place to aim on a relatively stationary bird on the ground is the head and neck area. A body shot might allow it to run or fly off to die where it can't be found. It is difficult to overstate how tough turkeys are.

The best shooting range is 20 to 40 yards. A 12-gauge should never be fired at a turkey that is more than 40 yards away. The chances of a lost cripple are too great.

The shot is usually taken by easing the gun into position as the turkey approaches behind a screen of trees and brush. Otherwise, the hunter may be forced to quickly mount the gun and shoot before the bird flies or runs. When so much depends upon one shot, the beginning turkey hunter is advised to try a few practice shots. Mounting a shotgun and aiming it like a rifle rather than wing shooting may lead to some surprising misses.



Turkey hunters may photocopy the inside back cover of this booklet for patterning their guns. Hunters may want to purchase a few shells of each legal shot size and shoot at the turkey profile from 25, 30, 35 and 40 yards. Guns with changeable or variable chokes should be tried with different combinations to find the best pattern so that shot will strike the skull or vertebrae for a quick and sure kill. Hunters might need to restrict shots to closer than 40 yards to assure a kill.

Practice aiming your shotgun like you would a rifle. Some guns don't have rear sights, so you may have to adjust your shot so the pattern's center strikes where you aim. Shotgunners are often surprised that their gun does not center the pattern where they aim.

Check what is behind your target. Is it safe to shoot? Is there a second turkey back there? (You are allowed only one turkey with your license.) Shoot so that you harvest only the bird you are aiming at.

Experienced hunters know that turkeys are hard to kill when strutting. Wait to shoot when the gobbler is no longer strutting. Shots at strutting gobblers too often lead to crippled birds because the head and neck are not extended.

Experienced hunters also recommend getting to the bird immediately after the shot. It may be necessary to stand on a wing to anchor the bird, or even to shoot it again.

## **SPORTSMANSHIP**

Turkey hunting, a relatively new sport in Minnesota, is developing into an excellent tradition. The first few years have resulted in virtually no complaints from landowners. It is hoped this good sportsmanship will continue and also become a Minnesota tradition.

The wild turkey is a supreme trophy for Minnesota hunters, a bird canny and elusive enough to challenge the best efforts of any hunter. The turkey should only be hunted by those ready to practice the highest standards of hunting skills and the strictest standards of sportsmanship and ethics.

Turkey hunting is a one-on-one sport, so you should not call a bird if you know another hunter is near by. Two hunters calling one bird may easily result in neither being successful. It is not ethical to shoot a bird "on the way in" in response to another hunter's calling. It is unwise and unsafe to approach a hunter who is calling a bird in.

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## TURKEY HUNTING SAFETY

A turkey's keen eyesight necessitates the use of camouflage clothing, but that makes hunters nearly invisible to turkeys and to other hunters as well. Turkey hunters calling in birds may attract other hunters who mistake their calling for the real thing. That has led to serious and fatal accidents. Of all the hunted species, turkey hunting nationwide has led to the most accidents, proportionately.

Safety must be given the utmost concern. Although bright colors reduce success rates, some hunters now wear blaze orange camo clothing, place blaze orange bands on nearby trees, or set up blaze orange signs proclaiming "Camouflaged hunter nearby—be careful."

Some hunters place a square of hunter orange on the back of their camo jackets, as well as strips on the back of their elbows. This helps identify their movements to other hunters. This has little effect on hunting success, because it is all but impossible to take a safe and accurate shot at a turkey approaching from behind.

Hunters often "see" what their mind wants to see and not what is actually there. The movement of a hand, for example, may trigger a hunter to "see" the movement of a turkey, due to the strong desire to bag game.

But hunters should remember that hunting is not competitive. Although harvesting game is a part of hunting, true sport hunters realize that there is much more to hunting than the kill.

Accidents usually occur at the moment of greatest excitement. Hunters must restrain their reflex to shoot without looking or thinking. Basic rules to consider whenever hunting:

- never shoot at sound or movement;
- never shoot at a patch of color and positively identify the target as legal game;
- always assume a sound or movement in the woods is from another hunter;
- always positively identify any target before raising a gun or bow;
- double check before shooting; and
- never shoot at flying or running turkeys, because they make poor targets and such shots usually result in crippled birds.

**Remember this:**

**Every time you pick up a firearm or bow, you pick up responsibility, so shoulder it well.**

When hunting companions forget or ignore safety measures, let them know positively and immediately.

Turkey habitat may include steep hillsides and uneven terrain that call for special safety precautions. When traversing this terrain and its obstacles, unload your gun's chamber. Carry broadheads in a protected quiver. You will not get a shot at a turkey sneaking or wandering through the woods, anyway. Protect your firearm in the event of slips or falls, control the muzzle, and carefully check the muzzle each time it makes contact with the ground.

Help yourself and your hunting companions by following the rules of safe turkey hunting:

- Approach no closer than 100 yards to a gobble, then call the bird to you. If it is a real gobble and you cannot call him, then you do not deserve him.

- Select a calling site in front of a tree or rock that is wider than your shoulders. This will protect you from behind and should also conceal any slight movement you make while calling.
- Shoot only at a gobble when it is in front of you; wait if you have to. A sudden swing to shoot behind you may find you facing the muzzle of another hunter.
- Select calling sites that allow visibility for 40 yards or more in all directions. You may be able to call an unskilled or careless hunter.
- **Never stalk a gobble.** It may be coming from another hunter.
- **Never attempt to call in a gobble with a gobble call while you are at a calling site.** You may call in another hunter.
- You can never be totally invisible, even with total camouflage; turkeys and other hunters will see your movements. Remaining still will harvest more turkeys than the best camo. It is movement that panics turkeys.
- **Never wear any clothing or undergarments that have shades of red, blue or**

white, since hunters might mistake these colors for a tom turkey's head.

- Never assume that what you hear, or what calls you hear, are from a turkey.
- Don't try to hide so well that you cannot see what is happening, since you can't shoot a turkey you can't see anyway.

**Remember this:**

**No turkey is worth a human life, so be certain of your target before you fire.**

After harvesting a bird, take one more safety precaution: carry your bird out of the woods in a large orange garbage bag or hunter orange wrap. If you carry the turkey over your shoulder there is a chance another hunter could mistake it for a live bird.

## **MAPS FOR USE IN HUNTING WILD TURKEYS**

Hunters unfamiliar with the typical turkey habitat terrain might be in for a surprise. By obtaining appropriate maps and/or aerial photographs, hunters might save time and energy during their scouting and hunting.

### **TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS**

Topographic maps show a wealth of information, including rough terrain (common in turkey country), roads, streams, building sites, etc. They are invaluable for locating land features that could provide good hunting sites.

Maps are ordered by quadrangle names. Most of the newer "quads" cover about 50 square miles each. Older maps are smaller scale and include about 200 square miles. If you know your exact hunting area, buy only the quadrangle that includes your hunting spot. Quadrangles may be obtained from:

Minnesota Geological Survey  
1633 Eustis Street  
St. Paul, MN 55108  
(612) 373-0223

U.S. Geological Survey Distribution Section  
Federal Center  
Denver, CO 80225



Maps are also available from private map companies.

### **COUNTY PLAT BOOKS**

Also known as a county atlas, a county plat book indicates county roads a township at a time, and also lists the names of landowners. This may save valuable time when trying to obtain permission to hunt private land, as required by the Minnesota Trespass Law.

Plat books are available for every county by contacting the appropriate county courthouse. County courthouse clerks have information on current land ownership.

### **AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHS**

Aerial photographs combined with topographical maps can save time and tired leg muscles. Farm programs have resulted in the taking of aerial photographs each year throughout the turkey range. By studying the photographs you can determine the type of crops or crop residues, tree cover, open areas, and much more.

Aerial photographs are available at county ASCS offices. Photocopies are inexpensive and cover small areas. Actual photographs may be clearer and cover a larger area, but they might have to be ordered in advance.

## **HUNTING EQUIPMENT**

The name of the game in turkey hunting is preparation. Engage turkey hunting friends in thorough discussions of the subject. Read articles and magazines. Obtain copies of the "Turkey Call" (a magazine produced by the National Turkey Federation), or select one of the many books written by turkey hunting experts. Learn to use the turkey call you choose, be it from an experienced caller or an instructional recording. Then practice, practice, practice perfecting your calling.

Assemble your equipment. A suggested list:

- A shotgun that you have patterned
- Shot shells
- Maintained archery equipment
- Turkey calls (know how to use)
- Carrying or plastic bags to keep calls dry
- Topographical maps
- Aerial photographs
- Camouflage clothing (a hat, face mask or camo face paint, coat, pants, gloves, dark socks, tape or sock for your gun or bow)
- Wet weather clothing
- Cushion for sitting
- Camera
- Binoculars
- Knife

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Compass (learn how to use it)  
Mosquito lotion  
Pack sack  
Carrying strap and hunter orange cover  
for harvested bird  
Survival kit, including 2 heavy duty  
garbage bags or a space blanket,  
waterproof matches, a candle, and a  
whistle  
Cooler and ice or other arrangements to  
care for the harvested bird  
Camping equipment or lodging ar-  
rangements

## ***TURKEYS AND TROPHIES***

A wild turkey gobbler is a real trophy and many hunters will probably consider having it mounted. The most common mounts are those with the tail, beard and possibly the wings displayed. A full mount requires extra care in the field. Here is a list of things to consider:

- Call several taxidermists in advance of the hunt to obtain price quotes and special field care instructions. Expect to spend \$150 or more for a full turkey mount.
- Visit several taxidermy shops to examine the quality of their bird mounting work. Most taxidermists will be proud to show you examples.
- Ask the taxidermist about field dressing the bird. Most prefer to do their own gutting and skinning, and may charge extra if there was improper field care.
- Take a small handful of cotton on your hunt. At the kill site, stuff small wads of cotton into the turkey's mouth, nostrils, and shot holes to keep blood off the feathers.

- Bring the ungutted bird to a taxidermist the day it is shot, if possible. If the weather is warm, go to the nearest town and temporarily store the bird in a cooler.
- a) If you field dress the turkey, be very careful not to get blood on the feathers. You will need a knife, a box of corn meal, and a small cloth to lay on the underside of the tail.  
  
b) Lay the bird on its back and place the cloth over the tail section so it is close to the vent. Cover the feathers on each side of the cut. Make a cut from the vent to the point of the breastbone. Sprinkle the corn meal liberally on the cut as it is being made to soak up excess blood. Properly done, feathers will stay clean.  
  
c) Next, withdraw the entrails. Keep sprinkling corn meal on the incision whenever blood begins to appear on feathers. Wipe the inside of the body cavity clean with a rag to prevent blood from draining onto feathers. Do not attempt to remove the crop.  
  
d) After the turkey is gutted, chill it until you reach a taxidermist.
- To avoid the need to refreeze the bird, see if the taxidermist will skin the bird while you wait, or return later the same day to pick up the meat.

## CLEANING AND COOKING

Turkeys that are not going to be mounted should be field dressed like any other upland bird. The entrails can be removed by the usual cut from the vent to the brisket. The idea is to let the inside of the bird cool as quickly as possible. Hunters must be prepared to care for their bird properly until they return home. If camping, a large cooler with adequate ice will be needed. Fill an airtight bag with ice and place in the body cavity before packing the whole bird in ice. Birds spoil and can be wasted by improper care.

Later, birds can be plucked or skinned. Plucking helps keep the bird from drying out while being cooked. Dipping in scalding water greatly helps with feather removal.

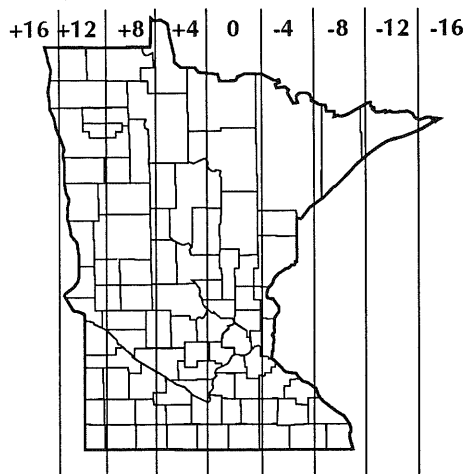
Wild turkeys are cooked almost exactly the same as domestic turkeys. The one difference is that wild birds will not be as fat. Larding the bird's breast with strips of bacon will reduce drying during cooking.

## SUNRISE AND SUNSET SCHEDULE

To be used for turkey hunting purposes in Minnesota.

The times shown are Central Standard Time. The times shown beginning April 30th and through October 27th are Central Daylight Savings Time.

The map below shows nine hunting time zones. To determine correct times for your location, add or subtract from times given in the table. The middle zone marked zero is the time shown in the table.



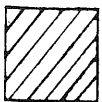
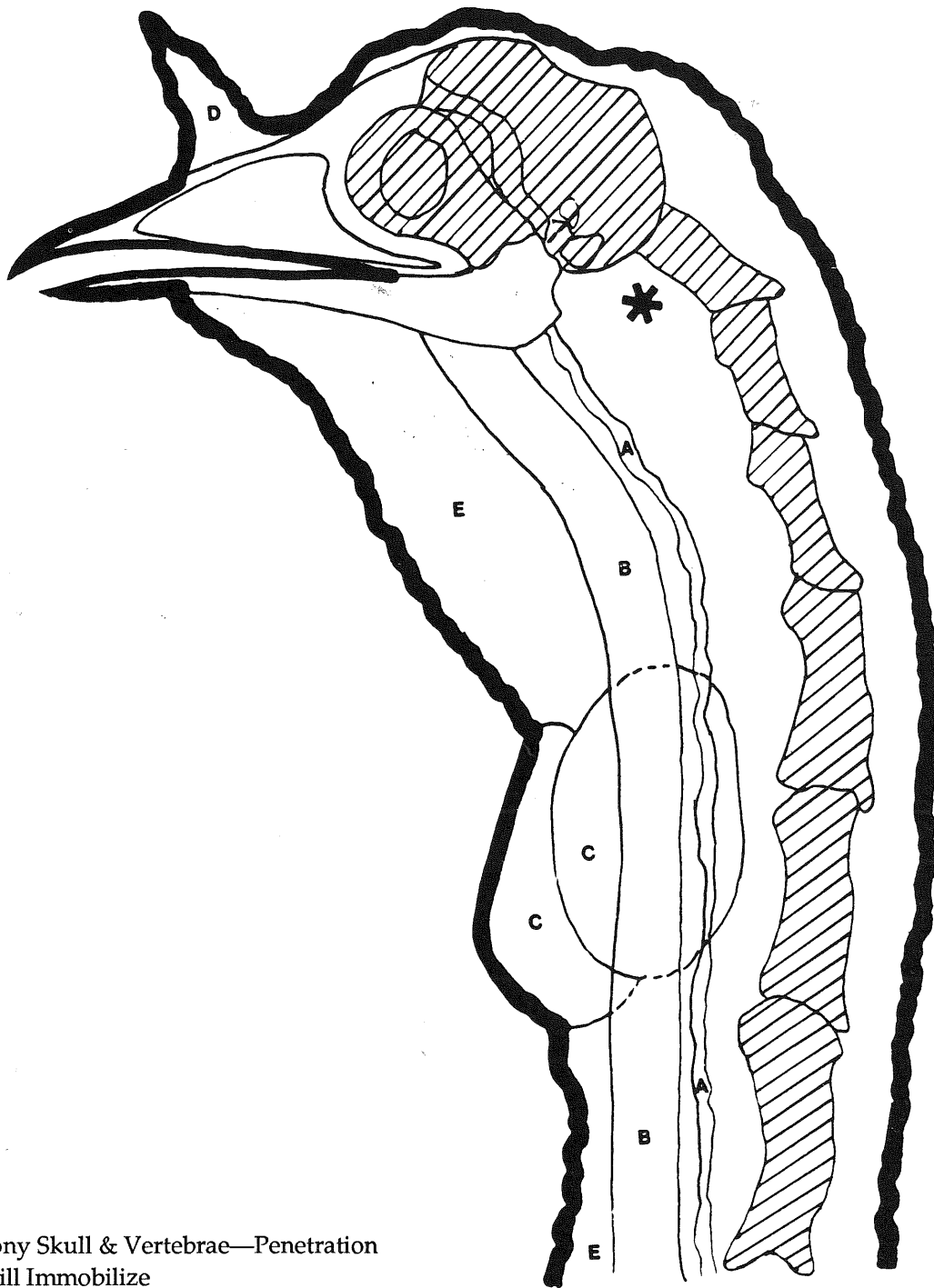
<i>April</i>			<i>May</i>			<i>October</i>		
date	rise	set	date	rise	set	date	rise	set
1	5:48	6:32	1	5:58	8:09	1	7:11	6:54
2	5:46	6:34	2	5:56	8:10	2	7:12	6:52
3	5:44	6:35	3	5:55	8:11	3	7:13	6:61
4	5:42	6:36	4	5:54	8:12	4	7:14	6:49
5	5:41	6:37	5	5:52	8:13	5	7:16	6:47
6	5:39	6:38	6	5:51	8:15	6	7:17	6:45
7	5:37	6:40	7	5:50	8:16	7	7:18	6:43
8	5:35	6:41	8	5:48	8:17	8	7:19	6:41
9	5:34	6:42	9	5:47	8:18	9	7:21	6:40
10	5:32	6:43	10	5:46	8:19	10	7:22	6:38
11	5:30	6:45	11	5:45	8:20	11	7:23	6:36
12	5:28	6:46	12	5:43	8:21	12	7:25	6:34
13	5:27	6:47	13	5:42	8:23	13	7:26	6:32
14	5:25	6:48	14	5:41	8:24	14	7:27	6:31
15	5:23	6:49	15	5:40	8:25	15	7:28	6:29
16	5:21	6:51	16	5:39	8:26	16	7:30	6:27
17	5:20	6:52	17	5:38	8:27	17	7:31	6:25
18	5:18	6:53	18	5:37	8:28	18	7:32	6:24
19	5:16	6:54	19	5:36	8:29	19	7:34	6:22
20	5:15	6:55	20	5:35	8:30	20	7:35	6:20
21	5:13	6:57				21	7:36	6:19
22	5:12	6:58				22	7:38	6:17
23	5:10	6:59				23	7:39	6:16
24	5:08	7:00				24	7:40	6:14
25	5:07	7:01				25	7:42	6:12
26	5:05	7:03				26	7:43	6:11
27	5:04	7:04				27	7:44	6:09
28	5:02	7:05				28	6:46	5:08
29	5:01	7:06				29	6:47	5:06
30	5:59	8:07				30	6:48	5:05
						31	6:50	5:03







# Gobbler Profile



Bony Skull & Vertebrae—Penetration  
Will Immobilize



Ideal Center of Pattern

- A. Esophagus or Gullet
- B. Trachea or Windpipe
- C. Wattles
- D. Snood of Dewbill
- E. Loose Neck Skin

***Make Copies of Drawing for  
Patterning Shotgun***

Drawing by John M. Idstrom using X-ray of adult  
spring gobbler. X-ray by Paul H. Pelham, C.V.M.

