Corn stalks whisper in the cool breeze, just before harvest. There’s a smell of fall in the air. A large family group of wild turkeys graze pasture grass, bugging on high-protein morsels, just before the first frost. Together since summer following the spring breeding season, a small bachelor gobbler group, indifferent to raising the young birds, cruises the distant edge cover. It’s mid-September, and New Hampshire’s fall archery season for turkeys has started.

The fall archery season in New Hampshire is long and leisurely, from September 15 to December 15, and only slightly abbreviated in WMU A, ending December 8. Wild turkeys and white-tailed deer are the focus. Given the length of opportunity, hunts are sometimes more low-key than the spring gobbler campaign. The fall archery season begins with lingering warmth and ends with the coming chill.

Much of the enjoyment of hunting autumn turkeys is found in the intangibles: crisp mornings, October’s abundant color, game and nongame wildlife interactions, the first snow flurries – simply feeling the seasonal shift and being immersed in it. For those of us who love America’s greatest gamebird, just being out there with these wild birds is often enough for our satisfaction.

TACTICAL TIPS: SCATTER AND CALL

Despite what some might say, fall turkeys talk plenty – every day in fact. Roost vocalizations commence as the sun rises. It’s often rowdy and loud. Young gobblers and hens make plenty of noise, the males now the size of their brood hen. After fly-down, however, the woods might likely grow quieter as they move off. Everyone’s been accounted for, and their day begins, feeding and focused on survival.
A dult fall gobblers talk too, often with raspy three-yelp notes. They cluck, and yes, they gobble. The latter sound – more commonly associated by hunters with spring gobblers alerting hens to their locations for breeding purposes – is surely heard year-round, with seasonal peaks, especially if you spend enough time in the fall woods.

Vocalizations for both gobblers and hens can be prompted by your hunting tactics, as well. As archery hunting goes, and turkey hunting in general, you can let the birds come to you – or you can go to them. The most popular tactic of fall turkey hunting, one that really gets them talking, is scattering social or family groups.

When you break up a flock, you gain a hunting advantage. Separated turkeys want to get back together. You can pattern them – or find them by moving slowly through the woods, listening for fall turkey activity such as leaf scratching as they feed. Once you locate birds, using terrain to cover your movements, you can scatter them. Put your bow down and rush the group. Ideally turkeys will fly off in many different directions, rather than together.

Afterward, set up, well-hidden if possible, and wait. They’ll begin vocalizing on their own to regroup, or you can initiate this by calling them. The trick in the fall is to call like the turkey you’re hearing. In New Hampshire, as with many fall turkey hunting states, either-sex turkeys are legal.

If a young turkey kee-kees – the maturing lost whistle of a juvenile hen or gobbler – imitate it. If you’ve separated a gobbler group, make coarse three-note yelps. Often, a brood hen will call to her scattered flock with assembly yelping, and pull group members her way. It’s tough to beat her at this game. Broodless hens can also be called in with clucking and yelping as well.

This interaction during archery hunting is a pleasure. It goes beyond just the kill. By targeting fall birds, you’ll build skills that will help you become a better spring turkey hunter.

**TREE STANDS AND BLIND SITS**

As fall turkey calling goes, softly yelping, clucking or kee-kee-ing from your tree stand, from a blind or on foot, might pull a muted response from a nearby flock. If one answers, mimic it. Bring the birds closer.

From a tree stand, encounters with the big birds might be incidental, left to chance. After all, archery deer season is also open at the same time. Some might view fall turkeys as a bonus to whitetail hunts, as both often use the same game trails.

From a blind, sitting passively, protected from the autumn elements, comfort rules. It’s also a good way to get a clear and reliable shot at a fall turkey in range. When hunting autumn birds with a bow, stake your blind between where turkeys roost and where they move to a preferred food source. This approach relies on woodsmanship, studying turkey sign in the form of tracks, droppings, leaf scratchings and dusting areas that they frequent, and piecing together the puzzle of flock movements.

**END GAME**

Practice with your bow and arrows. Become familiar with how your archery tackle will function ahead of time. Scout, watch and listen to fall turkeys. Interact with the birds. Enjoy the experience.

If and when you fill a tag on a New Hampshire fall turkey, the whole of the hunt is what you’re after. It’s all good.

Steve Hickoff is a longtime New Hampshire Wildlife Journal contributor and the author of several turkey hunting books.
Turkey Chili

- 1-2 pounds turkey breast (add more to your liking), skinned and cubed into 1-inch pieces (you can also use ground turkey)
- 1/4 cup flour
- 1 tablespoon of your favorite chili seasoning
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1/2 cup sweet yellow onion, diced fine
- 4 cups turkey, chicken or vegetable stock
- 1 tablespoon garlic
- 1 can (4 ounce) green chiles, diced fine
- 1 can each (15 ounces) navy beans, cannellini beans, and great northern beans, rinsed and drained

In a shallow pan, dredge the cubed turkey breast in the flour and chili seasoning. In a deep stockpot over medium heat, sauté the diced onion in the oil. Add in the turkey and sear until brown on all sides. Deglaze the pan by adding the stock, and bring to a boil. Add in garlic, green chiles and the beans. Cover and continue to simmer 40-50 minutes, or until desired thickness.

You can use wild turkey breast meat in almost any recipe that calls for chicken fillets or turkey. No, wild turkey meat isn’t gamey at all, and it’s not tough if it’s properly prepared.

Grill, fry or bake the breast meat or throw it into your favorite chili recipe, or roast the whole bird for Thanksgiving dinner. If the turkey has been skinned, “bard” the meat with strips of bacon, which keeps it from drying out. You can also cover the bird with tinfoil or use a store-bought oven bag to seal in flavor.

Make Your Own Turkey Stock

- Inside a tall stock or lobster pot, place 1 large quartered and skinned onion, 1 clove garlic and 1 tablespoon salt. Place in the pot two skinned turkey drumsticks and cover with water. Bring to a boil.
- Cover and simmer for 60-90 minutes, then using tongs, remove legs from the pot, cool and strip meat for use in casseroles, soups and stews. Strain and reserve liquid as turkey stock for soup bases. Package air-tight and refrigerate for up to three days, or freeze for up to 4 months.
- Repeat the process with the upper and lower de-feathered and skinned body of the turkey. Divide into two segments carefully, using a sharp knife.
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