

Mentored Turkey Hunt

By Carter Heath, President, Capital Region Strutters

That first gobble of the morning...one of the best sounds that a springtime turkey hunter can hear! This particular deep gobble was exactly where we wanted it to be, as we sat in the cool gray light of dawn.

This hunt was the culmination of months of preparation. As the President of The Capital Region Strutters, our Concord-based chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation, I was honored to be part of our Learn to Turkey Hunt Mentor Program, a collaboration with N.H. Fish and Game. "Save the Habitat, Save the Hunt" volunteers are enthusiastic and experienced turkey hunters who donate time, advice and hunting knowledge to people who are interested in learning more about this intriguing sport. From classroom time in late winter, to shotgun patterning, and, ultimately, an actual hunt, participants learn a lot about turkeys.

Joining me this morning was Sheri Croissant, a woman who had hunted deer, but had never tried turkey hunting. As we sat in the Double Bull blind that we had set the night before, I could see a huge smile under her camo face mask as that old bird continued to gobble on the roost. I had explained to her that this was absolutely not a "guided hunt." We were here to learn the subtle nuances of the sport, and if she had an opportunity to get a bird, it would be "icing on the cake."

As the turkey's throaty gobble continued to fill the brightening sky, I explained that once his feet hit the ground after fly-down, he would probably get quiet for a while. As it turned out, I was right, and Sheri got a good lesson in patience. We had done a few soft tree yelps earlier on, which he responded to, so we knew the bird was aware of our presence. After fly-down and the subsequent hour of the "silent treatment," he gave up an unprovoked gobble about 350 yards away. After a minute or two, we sent him some sweet talk with a cherry slate pot. His gobbling and excitement grew, and within 20 minutes, he was at 25 yards...straight behind us! Light purrs and clucks were keeping him interested, but try as we might, he just wouldn't present a shot;

ultimately, he gobbled off.

High fives and smiles filled the blind, and right then, a new turkey hunter was born! We decided that it was still early, and we were in a great spot. Luckily, the bird never spooked. After about 40 minutes, we reached out with some "cold calling," and he lit up. It was a great lesson for Sheri to hear his response,



Sheri Croissant (right) is all smiles after her successful turkey hunt with Carter Heath.

and even better that his gobbles were getting closer by the minute! This time, he stayed to our north and strutted just out of sight. After some exciting moments, he again left unscathed.

Take a friend hunting... together we can "Save the Habitat and Save the Hunt!"

Sheri was certainly getting the full experience and was loving every minute of it. We gave the tom some time to take care of whatever turkey business drew him away, then I looked at Sheri and whispered, "Ok...you're up. You are going to call this bird in!"

She confidently took her striker in her left hand and started a series of yelps on her slate that would have made a seasoned hunter

proud. The big old gobbler responded eagerly to her calls and was closing the distance... fast! At this point, Sheri got a lesson in how topography can determine where a turkey will go. To our left was a fairly steep draw which feathered out to the flat that he had used earlier in the morning to get behind us. Figuring that he would repeat his earlier footsteps, we waited until he gobbled one more time and then, knowing that he would not see us, we rotated the blind enough so Sheri would have a shot.

Hearts were beating fast in that blind as the sound of spitting and drumming became mixed in with that wonderful, loud rattling gobble. Sheri's eyes were the size of dinner plates as she hissed, "I see him!" The turkey came in right where we wanted him, strutting and completely focused on our decoy. I whispered, "He's in range...when you have a safe shot, take him." After what seemed like an eternity, he broke strut and stuck his neck up in a good opening at 28 yards. Sheri picked the spot on the turkey's red, white and blue head and neck, and the Harrington Richardson 20 gauge did the rest.

The 19-pound, three-year-old tom never knew what hit him, and as we walked up to that majestic bird, I knew that all was right in the turkey hunting woods. After tagging, photos, and a trip to the check station, we took care of the most delicious part of the hunt...the meat!

I feel privileged to have been a part of such a terrific hunt, and more importantly, share a memorable experience with a new hunter. This is how we as hunters and outdoors people can continue to promote and preserve this sport which we hold so dearly.



Sheri shoulders her prize.



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