A black and white photograph of a person in camouflage gear, including a cap and jacket, sitting in a field of tall grass. The person is looking down at a map or piece of paper held in their hands. The background is a bright, hazy sky.

*Never give up on making
a spring gobbler do what
you want. As they say, the
journey is the destination.
Enjoy it. And sometimes you
even win.*

10

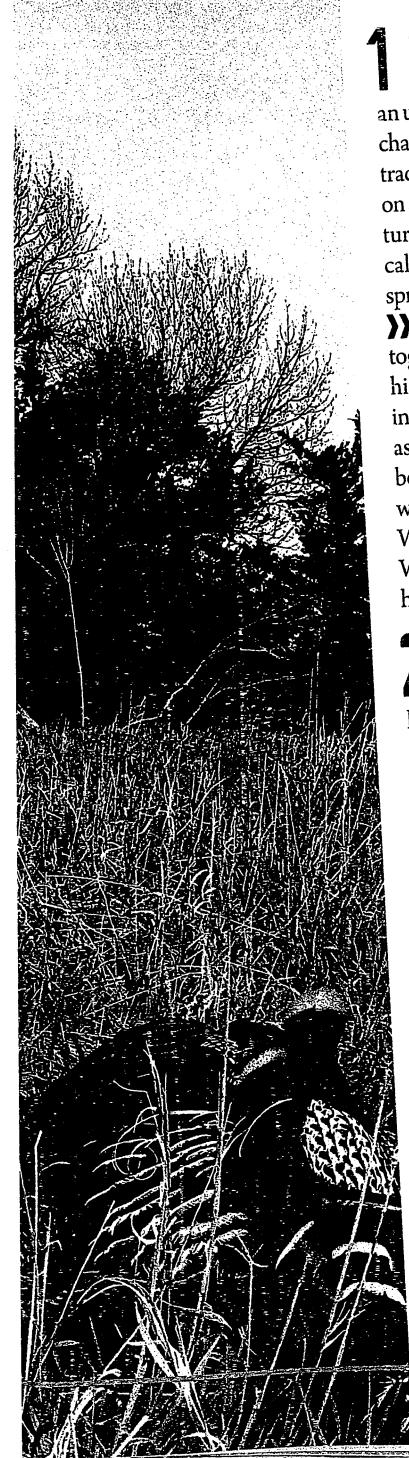
WAYS TO MAKE GOBBLERS DO YOUR BIDDING

Having trouble filling
your tag? Try these
tactical solutions to
kill tough turkeys.

story and photos by Steve Hickoff



On buddy hunts, stay together to sound like a flock, or split up to gain the advantage on pattern-shifting gobblers.



1 What to do when YOU HAVE HENNED UP BIRDS

Scatter the flock. It's a gamble, and possibly an unfamiliar tactic, especially for spring turkey chasers who don't hunt fall birds. Scattering, a traditional strategy during autumn hunts, relies on separating flocked turkeys. Once scattered, turkeys with strong regrouping desires can be called back to the gun or bow. It's effective in spring, too.

» **TIP:** Turkeys are turkeys. They want to be together and you can kill a gobbler by moving him in another direction, if you know his roosting limb. Make your move to scatter this bird as early light arrives. Watch his flight path. Sit between the boss gobbler and his hens, just as when you accidentally spook flocks off a roost. Wait or call to get a fix on his gobbling position. When he slips in looking for the closest calling hen (ideally you), shoot.

2 What to do when HENS PLAY TOUGH

Back off. Scott Basehore, an avid fall turkey hunter and well-known Pennsylvania custom callmaker, uses this tactic in spring, too (on foot instead of with his dogs): "Numerous times I've scattered a flock of spring birds, urgently yelped, and had a gobbler come in to the call. I usually won't scatter spring gobblers with hens until late season as I prefer to minimize pressure before then."

3 What to do when HE NEEDS ANOTHER DAY

Be patient. Watch and listen for the gobbler going to roost at fly-up time, or use locator calls to pull a shock gobbler from it before fly-down. If you're certain you've nailed the bird's pattern, simply get in there early and set up.

» **TIP:** Sit near roosted turkeys in the dark. Don't move. If you call at all, make it with a hands-free mouth diaphragm. For added realism, stake a decoy or two near your position and in range. As they fly down and regroup, that tough gobbler may move right in.

4 What to do when GOBBLERS WANT COMPANY

"As decoy numbers go, the more the merrier, especially in the early season," said Josh Grossenbacher of Zink Calls/Avian-X. "It might increase your odds of pulling in a gobbler, especially if a jake decoy is used with a bunch of hens." Grossenbacher stakes all decoys at 15 to 20 yards, heads facing his setup and feeding in one direction.

5 What to do when THE BIRD PATTERNS YOU

Change up your calls. Be honest. Sometimes your turkey hunting strategies are predictably limited. Calling the same way on the same gobbler from the same position might be a stale game plan. Maybe you favor one kind of call over another. Trade in your mouth diaphragm for a sweet-sounding custom box. Maybe hen yelps won't work. Try three-noted, raspy gobbler yelps to work on that tom's territorial urges.

» **TIP:** Soft-selling gobbler yelps can interest early- and late-season male spring turkeys just as these calls do in autumn. This call is deeper with a slower cadence — yawp-yawp-yawp — than faster, higher-pitched hen yelps. Call and keep your eyes and ears open for an approaching red head bobbing through the woods.

6 What to do when THE BIRD FEELS PRESSURE

Be quiet. Sometimes not calling is the best approach, as yelping hard can cause a gobbler to strut — and stay that way. Put your calls down. Take a nap. Scratch leaves as the time passes. Cluck now and then. An approaching tom might hear this — the sounds of a hen, it hopes — and come right in after a long drought. When you hear turkeys respond to the silence as if asking for a turkey response, cluck and yelp softer than you were before shutting it down.

» **TIP:** Act like a hyper-wary turkey. Make muted vocalizations. If turkeys are farther off, run a box or pot-and-peg call. Up close, calling softly with a hands-free mouth diaphragm is

the way to go. When the gobbler appears, shut up again. Let the bird look for you, closing the distance as it minces steps toward your position.

7 What to do when THE BIRD DOESN'T COME IN

Walk away from the hung-up gobbler. He's easy to see and hear — loud and proud. If it's clear you're in a standoff — he won't move and you can't slip closer — do the opposite. Ease in the other direction, softly calling as you slip away. Be the fickle hen. With any luck the gobbler will panic and move closer. Stay hidden and drift back toward the interested turkey.

» TIP: You've set up in one place. The turkeys fly down and go the other way. The next morning you set up where they went. The birds fly down and go where you were the day before. Frustrating, eh? Solution: Put a buddy in one location. Take the other spot. Double-teaming fills tags too.

8 What to do when THE BIRD HATES FAKES

Sometimes decoys, even hyper-realistic ones, don't look real to a live turkey. Sometimes it's a matter of an unmoving fake. Sometimes it's decoy positioning. As with sub-dominant longbeards or jakes, a full-fan decoy might keep them away. They aren't looking for a fight. The fake has fooled them, but they want no part of it, so don't use them on such birds.

» TIP: Spring gobblers sometimes enter fields at the highest point of open pastures, often following hens to strut zones. Make your morning setup between the roost and high-point strut zone. Sit inside concealing edge cover, with shooting lanes in front and wait. Kill the bird when he slips into view.

9 What to do when THE GOBBLER WANTS DECOYS

A turkey wants to see a decoy. In an open-area wooded situation, make your setup where you can kill a turkey when it steps out of cover. Stake a decoy nearby. Give the gobbler this as a visual reference and then close the deal.

» TIP: Maybe one decoy wasn't enough. Go bigger. Use tree calls, fly-down cackles, clucking, lost calling and straight yelping to pull in a group of turkeys you've roosted nearby. Curiosity kills birds too. A boss hen might investigate and pull a gobbler in with her. A subordinate longbeard could break from the roosted group and slip in.

10 What to do when A LONGBEARD NEEDS MORE TIME

"Don't ever give up. You might call to a tough old gobbler for 30 days, then kill it on the last one," said Quaker Boy's Ernie Calandrelli. His motto: Stay positive. 🐔

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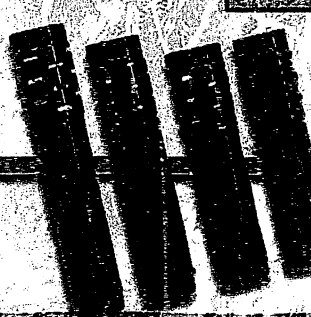
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