

Pattern Your Shotgun For Wild Turkey

Alabama has one of the greatest wild turkey populations in the United States, and the number of Alabama turkey hunters is increasing each year. Turkey hunters spend a great deal of time preparing for the turkey season. They spend hours practicing calling techniques, scouting, and purchasing all the clothing and equipment needed for successful turkey hunting.

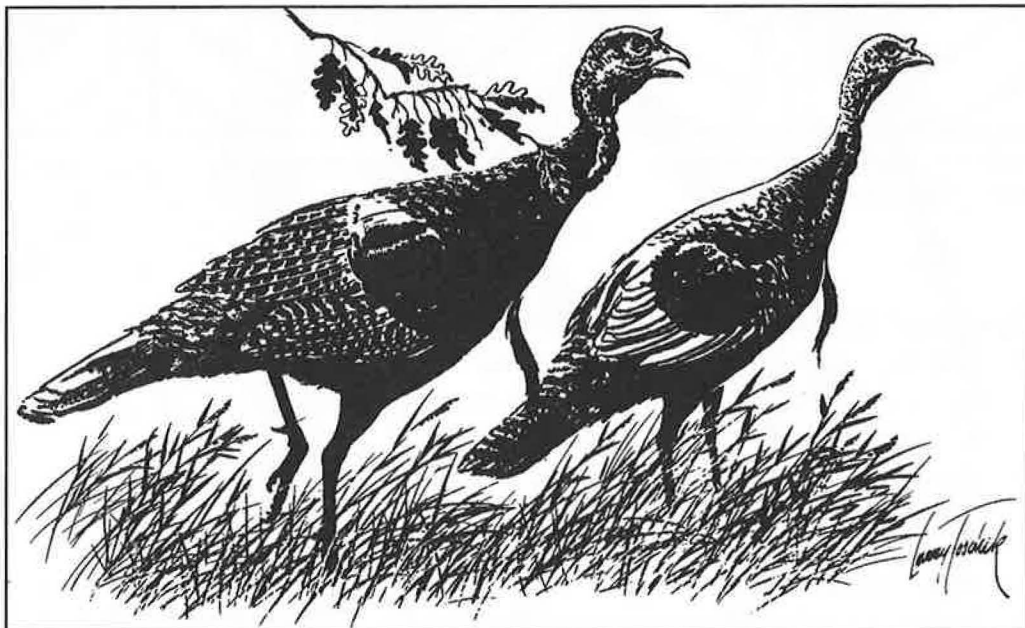
During these pre-season preparations, the vast majority of turkey hunters omit one essential item. The typical turkey hunter has no idea whether his or her shotgun can place six pellets in a vital area on a turkey standing 40 yards away. If it can't, the turkey is likely to be wounded and may escape only to die later. You can minimize the chance of this happening to you by patterning your shotgun during your pre-season preparations.

Patterning your shotgun is a simple thing to do and should be repeated with each gun, choke, load, and shooting distance. Different guns, even if they are the same model, make, and choke, can pattern differently. Different makes of shells, even if they have the same size and amount of shot and powder, can pattern differently, too.

For Best Results From Your Turkey Gun

To get consistent results when turkey hunting, follow these guidelines:

- Use a full or extra-full choke shotgun. A full choke will keep your pellets in a tighter group for a greater



distance, ensuring that more pellets hit vital areas. If your shotgun has a modified or improved choke, you should let the bird work in closer (20 to 35 yards) before shooting.

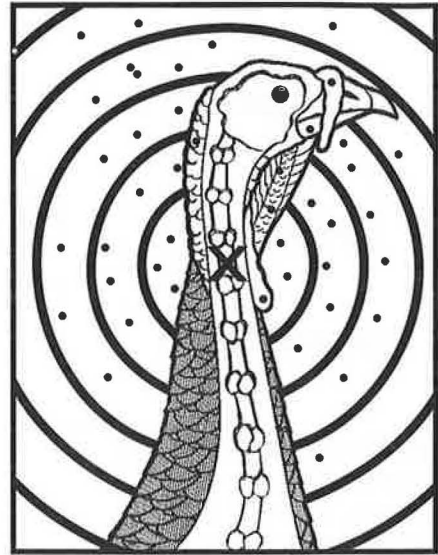
- Use a turkey load with #4 or #6 size shot. The smaller the shot size (the larger the number), the greater the number of pellets in a shell. However, the smaller pellets weigh less, carry less energy, and penetrate less deeply than a larger shot size. Turkey loads that have a combination of #4 and #6 shot are available. In Alabama, it is legal to use up to #2 shot size for turkey hunting.
- Wait until turkeys get close enough for your shotgun. The effective range for most shotguns is between 20 and 40 yards.
- Aim accurately and at the vital areas. Your point of aim should be just under the head in the middle of the neck, as shown on the turkey target (included in this publication).



Target 1. Multiple hits with good point of impact.



Target 2. Incorrect point of impact.



Target 3. Poor pattern, no vital hits.

Equipment Needed For Shotgun Patterning

- Shotgun you plan to use for turkey hunting.
- Shotgun shells you plan to use for turkey hunting.
- Several copies of this pattern target.
- Several 1 × 4's about 3 ½ feet long and pointed on one end.
- Hammer.
- Staples, tacks, or tape.
- Shooting or safety glasses.
- Hearing protectors.
- Pencil.

How To Pattern-Test Your Shotgun

1. Choose an area to shoot that has a safe back stop, because shot pellets can travel very far. Always wear shooting or safety glasses and hearing protectors when shooting.
2. Measure 40 yards from where you plan to sit when test shooting and use the hammer to drive one of the pointed 1 × 4's into the ground about 6 inches. Use the staples, tacks, or tape to attach the pattern target to the board. The center of the target should be about 2 ½ feet above the ground.
3. Move back and assume the normal shooting position you would use when turkey hunting (usually sitting).
4. Chamber one round of the load you would use to hunt. Aim at the center of the target and fire. Eject the spent shell and leave the chamber open.
5. Examine the target to see if the point of impact is centered. Determine if the center of your pellet

pattern is above, below, left, or right of the target center. Use your pencil and write on the target that you aimed "dead on center." Attach a new target to the target holder.

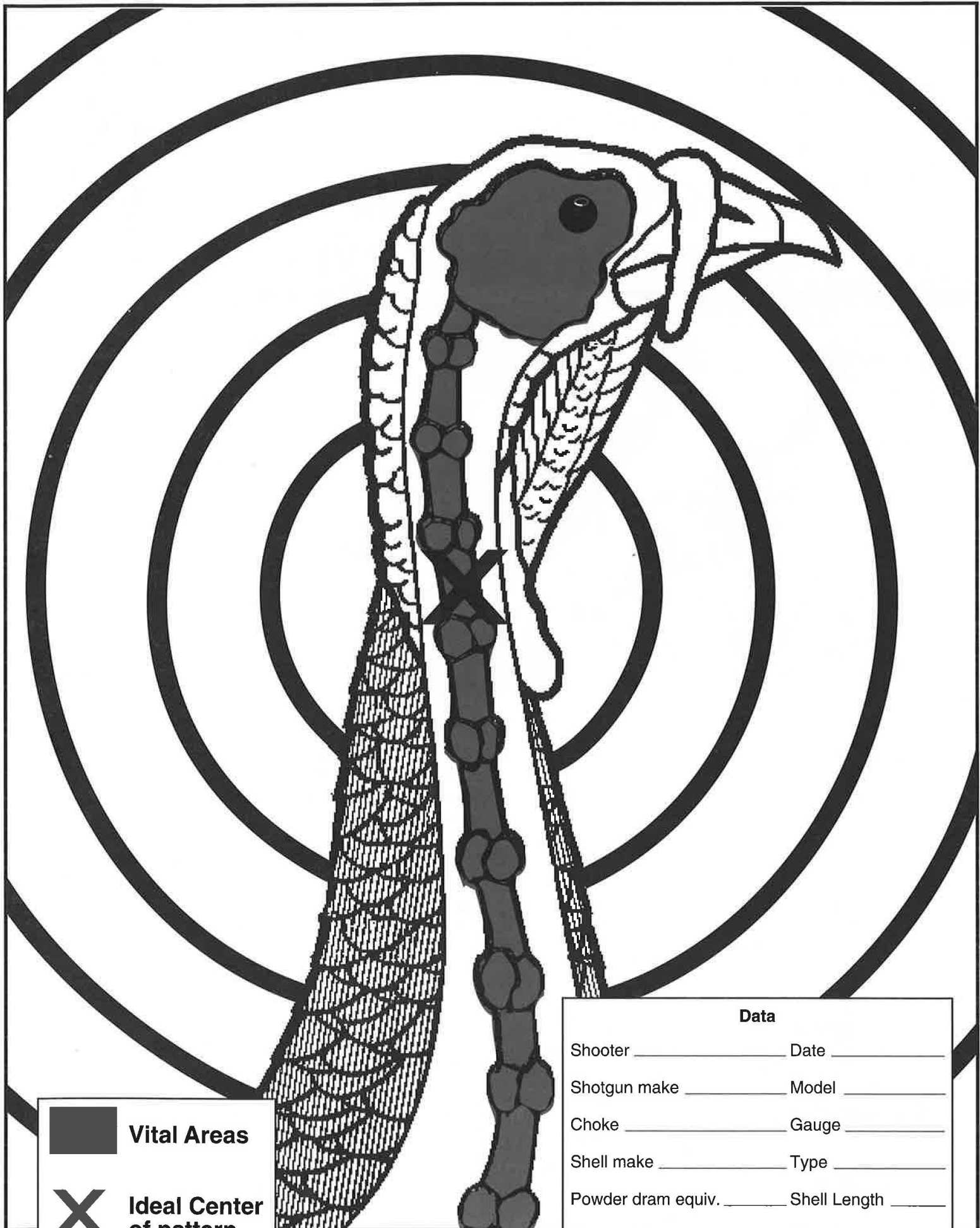
6. If your pattern was "off center," correct by adjusting your aim in the appropriate direction. Fire another round. If this pattern was centered, record your aiming adjustments on the target. You must remember your aiming correction when hunting in order to get the most effective performance from your shotgun and turkey load. Repeat this step as needed to get a "centered" pattern.
7. When you get a centered pattern, count the number of hits in the vital areas. You should get at least six hits in these vital areas to get consistent results and decrease wounding loss.


If you are not getting six pellets in vital areas, you may want to use a smaller shot size or move closer to the target. Shells with smaller shot carry a greater number of pellets, but the smaller size may require you to be closer to the turkey when shooting to ensure adequate penetration.

8. Once you get satisfactory results at 40 yards, then fire additional rounds at 25 and 45 yards. These rounds will show you what you can expect at different distances and help you determine your shooting limits.


Patterning your shotgun is a simple process that can make for more successful turkey hunting. Following these steps can ensure a more satisfactory experience for the hunter as well as less nonfatal wounding of the birds.







Vital Areas



Ideal Center of pattern

Data	
Shooter _____	Date _____
Shotgun make _____	Model _____
Choke _____	Gauge _____
Shell make _____	Type _____
Powder dram equiv. _____	Shell Length _____
Shot weight _____	Shot Size _____



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