

Turkey 101

by Beto Santos

It's spring. Let's take a look at a typical day in the life of a turkey...

1. Wake up at first light. Check in with your fellow turkeys on the roost. You are sitting on a top branch of a huge live oak tree on the creek. Hens cluck and Gobblers gobble. Everyone checks in so everyone knows where the others are. Turkeys have great hearing. They can tell on hen from another and just from the sound they know exactly where the hen is located.
2. You wait till you can see the ground and make sure there are no predators around. Once you feel the coast is clear, you will fly down.
3. Hens fly down from the roost "cackling" and start their routine for the day. Their routine is mostly to search for food and water, as well as see what good strong gobblers are out there to pick from. This is the breeding season so when Mr. Right call, the hen will come to him and stick around with him until she is bred.
4. If the hens found food in a certain place yesterday, the older hens will likely take the lead to the same productive spots. Hens move at a steady pace except when they pause to feed. They normally cluck and scratch the ground in search of bugs, seeds or other goodies.
5. Big Tom Gobblers will cruise the hen feeding grounds and look for new hens to court that day. They also keep a sharp eye on the hens that have already joined his harem.
6. By mid breeding season the Big Toms Gobblers must work pretty hard just to keep their harems together. Younger Gobblers and those young Jakes will try to take advantage of his large harem and try to "help" him out. The Big Tom will show his might by fluffing up his feathers, turning his head red, white and blue and by gobbling very loud. His actions say, I am here, I am big and strong, and I am ready for the hens to show up. Loud gobbles and feather displays usually work to scare off younger males but if it does not work he will fight to keep all other intruders away.
7. By late season, most of the hens are breed and sitting on their nest, The Big Toms will look for hens that have not been breed.
8. Once bred the hen no longer need the Gobbler so they leave him behind and set out to build their nest in a choice spot. Once they lay their clutch of eggs she will stay on the nest day and night. She will only leave the nest for food and water.
9. Turkeys have certain "rules" or "guidelines" that they follow during their day. Here are the important ones you need to know.
 - a. Gobblers will gobble as a reflex to a challenge gobble from another turkey, or when they hear an owl hoot, a coyote howl, a crow call, or any other sudden noise like a door slamming on a pick up truck.

- b. Gobblers will also gobble when they feel there is an available hen that has lost her way and if he only gobbles she will run to him.
- c. Hens, when they hear a big gobble or see a large gobbler puffed up and strutting his stuff, will go to the gobbler.
- d. Gobblers are short in patience. If the Hen does not come to him (like she should), and if she sounds too good to pass up, he will break the rule (the rule is actually a guideline) and he will go to her.
- e. He may choose to come gobbling in and puffed up or he may use stealth and just appear close by her.
- f. He may just get close enough for her to see him and expect her to come in the rest of the way. When this happens we say the gobbler is hung up.
- g. If she uses her extra sweet purrs and sexy cuts a hen can make a hung up gobbler come to her.
- h. She can also pretend to move away. This will anger the gobbler and he may come running in.
- i. Gobblers do not like completion. If they feel they are in a competitive situation, they will try to run in and win fast.
- j. Gobblers like a clear path to their hens. They will not want to jump fences, creeks, or ravines when they are on their “love run.”
- k. Gobblers have great hearing. If your calling is not great, stick to simple clucks, and don’t call too much.
- l. Gobblers do not like hens that talk too much, so don’t call too much.
- m. Gobblers and Hens both have great eyesight. Mask all skin, shiny surfaces of glasses, guns, etc. And do not make any fast moves. If you do not want to be seen use full camo and minimize your movements. If a turkey is looking at you and you have to move, move very slowly.
- n. Hens that sense danger or an unidentified foreign object will sound an alert by making a putt, putt, putt sound.

The object of a spring turkey hunt is for the hunter to coax a Gobbler into shotgun range (35 yards or less) by using calls and a decoy. You have to be convincing enough to have the Gobbler break the rule (guideline) of having the hen come to him.