

Learn the Breeding Cycle of a Wild Turkey

Let's face it, we will never know exactly what a gobbler is thinking. However, we have a good idea of what his motives are during the spring.

In one word — girls. During summer, fall and winter a gobbler's movements will be determined, in large part, by where he can find his next meal. As the days grow longer, they turn their attention toward more important things like breeding hens. Learning how a gobbler reacts to hens can help you improve your chances of tagging a longbeard this spring.

In principle, spring turkey hunting is not difficult. Find a gobbling bird in the predawn darkness and set up nearby. As the sun starts to break the horizon, let out a few hen yelps and sit at the ready. When the bird flies down and walks within 30 yards, take him.

In the woods, however, it doesn't always work that way. Oftentimes, the trick to turkey hunting is finding the right bird at the right time in the right place. The same bird that ignored your calls in the morning may run you over later that afternoon.

Here are a few general tips about turkey behavior in the spring:

- Gobbling is used to bring hens to the gobbler. Remember that you are trying to do the opposite when you are turkey hunting. Be patient and adjust your calling intensity to suit his mood. You will typically want to try and get him fired up.
- Strutting is a close-range technique to attract hens to the gobbler.
- Dominant toms usually gobble more than subordinate ones.
- Jakes do gobble and strut. However, they are often afraid to, especially later in the spring after a dominant bird has whipped them a few times. Just because the spring woods are quiet doesn't mean there aren't any turkeys around.
- Gobblers are usually surrounded with hens early in the morning. Toward midmorning, the hens will often leave them to sit their nests. The time to be there is when a old tom is alone. Did you ever have a vocal bird at predawn working your calls only to have the bird shut up when he flew off the roost? It is probably no surprise, but he most likely had hens all around him.
- Gobblers still mate in the rain — they just don't gobble as much or you can't hear them as much due to the noise. There is no reason why hunting rainy-day gobblers can't be successful. Look for birds in fields and pastures when it is raining.
- A common misconception is that toms sometimes just get tired of gobbling and shut up later in the season. This is not true. Gobbling will peak just before hens are ready to breed (usually just before your hunting season starts) and again after most hens have started to incubate their eggs (usually toward the middle to later part of your season). Late-season hunting is a great time to find a lonesome tom.



Source: National Wild Turkey Federation
<http://www.nwtf.org/>

