

Record Toms - How to Score Your Turkey

by Matt Lindler

To most hunters, any animal harvested is a trophy. We relish our time in the woods with family and friends, and a harvest just accentuates the experience. But occasionally, we might stumble upon success beyond our wildest dreams, taking an animal of such beauty and stature that it's bound to go in the record books.



You take pride in fooling a wise old gobbler to walk within gun range. But entering it into the ranks of the top turkeys is a whole different sense of accomplishment.

Photo courtesy of the NWTF/Larry Price.

Big-game rifle hunters know that the Boone and Crockett Club or Safari Club International are institutions for recording truly trophy ungulates, predators and other animals. Bow hunters have their Pope and Young Club for the same reasons. But many turkey hunters have no idea where to go to record extraordinary longbeards for posterity, conservation and bragging rights. The National Wild Turkey Federation is the place. Its Wild Turkey Records have 30 years of data on more than 17,000 amazing trophy birds. Interested in putting your name in the “book?”

The program ranks wild turkeys based on beard, spur length. The categories are broken down by subspecies and state.

The online database at nwtf.org contains information on all North American wild turkey subspecies and the unique ocellated wild turkey found in Mexico, Guatemala and Belize.

Hunters can search by the type of bird or by beard length, spur length, weight, typical or atypical or even by the type of sporting arm used to take the bird.

HOW DOES YOURS RANK?

Want to see how your bird ranks? Fill out the online calculator or use the instructions below to obtain a total score, then compare it to the scores in your state or the country.

Before scoring your turkey, you'll need a flexible measuring tape that shows 1/16-inch increments and an accurate scale. Note that all measurements are converted to decimal form. A current NWTf member or another licensed hunter from the state where the bird was harvested must witness all measurements.

Step 1: Weigh

Weigh your bird in pounds and ounces. Convert ounces to decimal form. There are 16 ounces in a pound. So, 22-pound, 12-ounce bird would convert to a 22.75-pounder.



Photo by Aaron Decker

Step 2: Spurs

Measure each spur. Spurs must be measured along the outside center, from the point at which the spur protrudes from the scaled leg skin to the tip of the spur. Add both spur measurements and multiply the combined length of the spurs by 10. This is the number of points you receive for the turkey's spurs.

Step 3: Beard

Measure the beard length from the center point of the protrusion of the skin to the tip of the longest feather. Convert length to decimal form. Multiply the beard length by 2; this is the number of points you receive for the beard length. If you have an atypical bird with multiple beards, measure each beard, convert them to a decimal number, add those

figures together and multiply by two. This is the number of points you receive for your turkey's beards.

Step 4: Total Score

Sum the weight and the points for spurs and beards. This is your total score.

A handy conversion chart is available on the Wild Turkey Records Web page to help you convert fractions and ounces to decimals. The online scoring calculator does the majority of this for you, so it's much easier to use.



Photo by Aaron Decker

Let's say I kill a 20-pound Eastern with an 11-inch beard and spurs measuring $1 \frac{1}{8}$ inches on the left and $1 \frac{3}{16}$ inches on the right. Using the calculator or the formula above, I get a total score of 65.125. If I were hunting in South Carolina, that score would put me at a tie for 61st place in the state but not even into the top 500 in the country.

While that's pretty humbling after killing a very respectable adult gobbler, knowing this helps me better understand that there are some truly majestic gobblers out there for the taking, and if I'm patient and in the right place at the right time, I could be lucky enough to take one of them.

One day, I could top Travis Roth's world-record, eight-bearded Eastern gobbler that scored a whopping 199.90 points!

If you suspect you've taken a world- or state-record tom, call a state wildlife officer, biologist or NWTF representative to officially verify all measurements. If one of these people is not in your area, freeze the bird whole until you can make arrangements to have it officially verified.

In addition, Easterns, Rio Grandes, Merriam's and Gould's subspecies turkeys weighing more than 22 pounds, Florida subspecies heavier than 20 pounds or ocellated turkeys weighing more than 10 pounds must be weighed to the nearest ounce on scales inspected and certified as accurate for trade by the state department of agriculture. A weight coupon or signed document must be presented for proof and an additional witness also is required. Beards measuring more than 12 inches must have additional witnessing and the application must include a photograph showing measurement. Spurs measuring over 1.5 inches must have additional witnessing and applications must include photographs showing measurement. Include a picture if your bird has multiple beards. All this sounds like a hassle, but it preserves the integrity of the program.

SLAMS

The Wild Turkey Records are not just for keeping track of who's the boss gobbler. Hunters on the quest for a "Slam" — one of the biggest feats in turkey hunting — can register their birds to qualify for official recognition.

There are five recognized slams in turkey hunting: Grand, Royal, World, Mexican and Canadian. Birds must be killed within the range borders designated by the NWTF to count as that species or subspecies.

- **Grand Slam:** Eastern, Rio Grande, Merriam's and Osceola (Florida) birds.
- **Royal Slam:** Four subspecies listed above in addition to the Gould's bird.
- **World Slam:** Five subspecies listed above in addition to the ocellated wild turkey.
- **Mexican Slam:** Consists of the following birds harvested in Mexico only: Rio Grande, Gould's and ocellated.
- **Canadian Slam:** Consists of harvesting the Eastern and Merriam's birds in the following provinces: Ontario, Quebec, Manitoba, Alberta or British Columbia.

The NWTF has compiled a list of people who have completed each slam. The wild turkey records database accumulates records on all wild turkeys currently or previously registered to determine who has achieved Grand, Royal, World, Canadian and Mexican Slam status.

The best part is you don't have to kill all of the birds in a calendar year to achieve a slam. Birds can be accumulated over a lifetime of hunting.

The only stipulations are that you must be an active NWTF member, or become a member at the time of registration, and pay the \$15 per bird registration fee.

Personally, during 14 years of hunting turkeys, I have completed three Grand Slams, one with a 20 gauge, one with a 12 gauge and one with a muzzleloader. It took me five years and breaking a curse to complete my muzzleloader Grand Slam.

(Article Courtesy of Gameandfishmag.com)