

Tactics For Bowhunting Turkey

by Tracy Breen



Bring your draw weight down 10 pounds or so. You'll likely have to hold at full draw longer than you would on your average deer hunt.

Photo by Tracy Breen.

Turkey hunting is challenging — especially if you're trying to tag a tom with a stick and string.

Over the years, I've watched friends go from a shotgun to a bow. It's a progression many hunters embark on simply because it's a challenge.

In most states, the success rate with a bow hovers around 10 percent. Turkeys have a small vital area. And when you consider their amazing ability to see you draw and hear the smallest twig break or bow string creak, you have one heck of a challenge on your hands. The good news is with the right gear and persistence, tagging a tom with a bow isn't impossible.

GET CLOSE

If you want to chase turkeys with archery gear this spring, plan on bringing them in as close as you can to your setup. The easiest way to do that is to use decoys. Brett Berry of Zink Game Calls said he brings birds in close by using two or three decoys.

“Two hens and a jake often get a tom cranked up, and he'll come running in,” said Berry. Putting your decoys at 15 yards and shooting out to 20 or 25 yards is a great setup. The decoys serve two purposes:

- They bring the tom in close, and
- act as a great yardage marker so you know how far away the bird is when he approaches the decoys.

BREAK UP YOUR OUTLINE

Turkeys can see most movement, so you must conceal yourself the best you can. There are a variety of things you can do to ensure you get your bow drawn without being busted by a tom or his ladies. The most popular choice is using a pop-up blind. Most modern day blinds have a black interior so you can be seen from the outside looking in. Pop-ups can be incredibly effective.

Personally, I prefer the run-and-gun method and hunkering down in the brush when the moment of truth arrives.

Joel Maxfield from Mathews Archery kills several longbeards each spring with a bow and likes using the time-tested gun method of finding a big tree and setting up at the base. "I find an extra large tree and set up right in front of the tree," Maxfield said. "When the bird approaches, the tree breaks up my outline. When the tom struts or goes behind a tree, I draw my bow."

Another option is using a crossbow. With a crossbow, you don't have to worry about the tom seeing you draw your bow because you are cocked and ready to rock.

YOUR BOW RIG

Almost any modern bow setup can quickly kill a turkey.

Axle-to-Axle

When I am bowhunting for turkeys, I prefer a short axle-to-axle bow because it is easy to maneuver when seated in a blind or on the ground. Most bow companies are making bows that are 33 inches or shorter, perfect for turkey hunting.

Adjust Poundage

I like dropping the poundage of my bow while turkey hunting. When big-game hunting, I have my bow set at 70 pounds. When turkey hunting, I have it set at 60 pounds. I do this so I can hold my bow at full draw as long as possible. Sometimes a tom will come in and walk around for a minute before I get a shot. I like to be at full draw before he is in my lap so he won't notice me drawing my bow. As a result, I have to draw before he gets into range and hold it there.

Expandable Broadheads

When it comes to broadheads, any broadhead will get most jobs done. But a lot of bowhunters prefer expandable broadheads when turkey hunting.

John Schaffer from Schaffer Performance Archery Products prefers Grim Reaper Broadheads. "Grim Reaper Broadheads have a 2-inch cut, which is perfect for turkeys," said Schaffer. "The vitals of a turkey are very small so the larger the cut of the broadhead, the better chance I have of getting the job done."

Other large expandable broadheads that work well are the Rage, The Expanded by Sanford Innovations and the NAP Bloodrunner. If you are using a crossbow, an

expandable broadhead is a great option because they fly well out of high-speed crossbows.

SHOT PLACEMENT

Shot placement is very important when bowhunting turkeys. Many bowhunters go home empty-handed because they couldn't find the turkey after the shot. You can shoot a turkey in the head, at the butt of the wing and right up the back end and quickly kill the bird.

A head shot is very popular for hunters who are using broadheads designed to take the head off of a turkey. However, my favorite place to shoot a turkey is between the legs, halfway up the body of the bird. Shooting a turkey here breaks the tendons going to the legs of the bird so it can't walk or fly. The broadhead will take out the back half of the chest cavity. Shooting the bird above the legs will ensure that he won't be able to run or fly away.

Calling plays a big role in successful turkey hunting with a bow. If you want to bring a bird in close, you must sound like a turkey. I often bring four or five different calls with me into the woods. Sometimes using a mouth call, a slate or glass call and a box call one right after another so you sound like a bunch of hens is what is required to bring a bird into your lap.

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