



# Prepare now for fall turkey hunt

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September 3 2017 8:54 PM



Most any successful turkey hunter will admit that fall hunting includes a combination of outdoor savvy, hunting skills and luck. Successful hunters usually possess some of each of these skills.

Most everyone who travels back country roads in the winter has seen flocks of wild turkeys feeding in the grain fields. Finding them in the woods, however, is often a completely different situation.

Since fall hunting is only offered in the state's prime turkey turf, this typically means birds are generally well distributed throughout these counties.

The best turkey hunting is found in areas contain a mixture of larger mast-producing hardwoods and crop fields. This interspersed of timber and fields offers turkeys the optimum in cover, food and brood habitat.

Pre-season preparation is likely the most important part of any turkey hunt.

Experienced hunters spend a great deal of time scouting known turkey areas.

By the time the season opens, many of the best hunters usually know where they regularly roost, which direction they generally feed and even how many birds are in the group.

In the fall, small groups of mature males turkeys typically segregate during the day from the hens and immature birds. However, gobblers and family groups will often roost in the same general area.

It only makes sense to begin the hunt near the roosting areas. Many experienced hunters will head to the woods the evening before a hunt just to locate these roosting sites.

During evening scouting trips, try to arrive an hour or more before roosting time.

Turkeys will often come to the roosting area long before they take to the trees.

Though roosting turkeys are not particularly vocal this time of year, there is no mistaking the sound from their huge flapping wings. Listen carefully for birds that may be flying to roost and try to pin point their location. Then, try to determine which way the birds are likely to head in the morning.

Since this is where you will first set up, spend a little time looking for good hunting spots.



The luck comes into play only after locating the roosting birds. Unfortunately, there is never any guarantee which way these whimsical birds will head in the morning.

Though turkeys are a creature of habit, they've been known to regularly change their routine, particularly when I'm in the woods.

If your attempt for early morning success fails, try to determine which way the birds headed and attempt to slip ahead of the feeding flock. This is probably when most fall hunters experience success.

Other than the proper firearm and shells, quality camouflage could likely be the most important equipment for a fall turkey hunter. Autumn brings a new look to the Illinois woodlands and various shades of brown are the most predominant colors.

The best camouflage blends in with the surroundings. Most hunters will also wear gloves and a face mask to conceal the shine from their hands and face.

Though good turkey calling is critical to spring hunting, it plays only a minor role in the autumn hunt. In fact, many successful fall hunters do not even use a call. Still, there are a few purists who break up flocks of birds then attempt to call them back. In either case, a few soft clucks and yelps are the only calls needed during a fall hunt.

Since turkeys are a fairly large bird, the proper firearm and shells are very important.

Most hunters prefer to use a 12- or 10-gauge shotgun with a full choke (or special turkey choke) barrel. A 20-gauge is adequate but hunters should consider using a three-inch shell. Shot size is a matter of preference with choices ranging from number four to six shot.

Patterning the gun prior to the season is critical to hunting success. Hunters will find that certain shells and shot sizes perform best for each individual gun. Trying a few different loads at varying distances can greatly improve the odds for success. A hunter takes aim at a turkey some 30-yards away, he needs to know exactly how his gun performs.

Some folks say wild turkeys lack intelligence. Perhaps this is true, but they are also exceptionally wary. They must be to survive as most every large creature residing in the woods has thoughts of capturing a Thanksgiving dinner.

Perhaps it is this lack of intelligence combined with the wariness that makes hunting these majestic birds such a challenge. They are certainly unpredictable and often frustrate the most experienced turkey hunter.

Still, most will admit there is no Illinois hunting experience more exciting than turkey hunting.