

# Spring Wild Turkey Season

-Reg Wiebe, MWF Hunter Education Coordinator

What started out as a valiant attempt at conducting a mentored Wild Turkey Hunt this spring, ended up slightly different than the game plan. It seems finding Wild Turkey hunt mentors is a lot more difficult than finding mentors for waterfowl and deer hunting. So, it was on to "Plan B"!

Plan B worked so well that I think it is going to be the benchmark for future Wild Turkey hunt programs. It was decided that due to a lack of mentors, the least we could do was offer a Wild Turkey Hunting seminar. Well, to say that it was a success is probably the understatement of the year! The applicants wanting to participate in a mentored Wild Turkey hunt were contacted and all "wannabe" turkey hunters plus friends and family members attended the evening informational session on Wild Turkey hunting. It was most encouraging to see the positive response from the audience listening intently as presenters talked about their Wild Turkey hunting experiences and explained some "tricks of the trade". Representatives from the mentored hunt partnership, Manitoba Conservation and Delta Waterfowl, were in attendance to make informative presentations. One of our own Hunter Education instructors demonstrated turkey calling techniques that brought him success in his forays.

I learned a few little tricks that helped me get my first gobbler with my bow! Even though successfully filling a tag is 90% luck, the information shared at the seminar was most valuable.

Before the 2009 Wild Turkey season started, my 10 year-old grandson was calling me occasionally with the latest report on the turkey situation. Their farm has a small population of Wild Turkeys that travel back and forth from the farmyard to the pasture. While in the yard, they are nothing more than a domestic turkey looking for a free lunch. Out in the pasture, a half-mile away from the farmyard, they are definitely "Wild Turkeys"! There are a few game trails through the woods where the turkeys travel between the yard and the pasture. One of these trails offered up a nice six inch bearded Tom much to the dismay of my grandson who was in school at the time. I had taken a quick trip to the farm that day to check on the turkey situation. I discovered a flock of turkeys heading out to the pasture. I decided to grab my bow, some camo, a call and head out to the pasture via one of the game trails in the bush. The turkeys had moved out almost a half-mile and as I came out at a corner of the field, I was "busted"! One of the Toms decided to head for the bush. I

stayed put until he reached the edge of the bush and then I decided to slowly work my way back up one of the game trails toward him. Suddenly, out of nowhere, there he was! He began strutting facing me and then turned. As he turned, I drew my bow and with 15 yards separating us, the arrow found its way through the rear of the bird, exiting through the front. It took a while to find him as he took off into the thick underbrush. With the help of my son-in-law and grandsons who were now home from school, we found the bird some 80 yards from where he was shot.

Much to the dismay of my 10 year-old grandson, the turkey hunt was over. Or, so I thought. The following day the elder, 13 year-old grandson decided that although he normally enjoys deer hunting, he would like to try turkey hunting with a shotgun. The younger grandson isn't a big fan of loud guns as he has extremely sensitive hearing, which is why he prefers to accompany me when I'm bow hunting.

After getting his youth licence, the elder grandson was now anxious to fill his tag. We set up decoys and watched from behind a portable blind on the very first evening of his hunt. We spotted a flock of birds with 3 good-sized Toms. They seemed to be going away from us but eventually they turned and came toward the decoys. At 30 yards, the 3 Toms were so close together that a shot at any one of them would have killed all 3! It seemed like forever before one of the Toms decided to separate from the group. BOOM! The intended target ducked and ran right back between the other 2. Then, as though it was rehearsed, all 3 birds walked away so close together, there was no opportunity for a second shot. The look on my grandson's face was one of surprise, disappointment and disgust all at the same time. "How could I have missed?" he asked. I replied "Easy son, you forgot that most shotguns shoot high, particularly a field gun."

"But I aimed at his head!" he retorted. "Yeah, that's what I figured! A little lower and he would have been down."

Picking up the decoys and packing up the blind went rather quietly that evening as the young hunter reflected on his disappointing, yet exciting hunt. On the way back to the farm, the young hunter went over the evening's events in his mind and out loud many times. "Typical of many hunts in my time too" I murmured to myself.

We managed to set up another hunt the following week but the birds seemed wary of the decoys. Eventually, they came around but not close enough for a good clean shot. Eventually a curious fox



Reg and his younger grandson Evan

herded the turkeys off in another direction. A half hour after the fox left the area, the turkeys came back but were extremely cautious. There was lots of activity, but no opportunity for a shot.

The weather decided to get nasty most of the following week. I promised my grandson that we would go if the weather cooperated. Having too many things on my mind and with the lack of decent weather, I sort of forgot about the turkey hunt and the promise I had made. Leaving work a bit late one evening, I no more than left the parking lot when the phone rang. It was my grandson wondering if I was taking him turkey hunting that evening. I was rather embarrassed that I had forgotten my promise as I was an hour and a half away from his place and likely another ½ hour before we would be set up for the hunt. I rushed as hard as I dared. Upon arriving at the farm, the decoys, blind and gun were ready to go as well as one anxious hunter and his younger brother with a set of ear defenders who had decided that he wasn't going to miss another turkey hunt just because of a noisy gun! As we picked up the gear to head out, my son-in-law pointed toward a flock of 6 turkeys, 3 Toms and 3 hens heading into the farmyard. I looked at my grandson whose eyes told the whole story. No hunt tonight! Although it would have been easy to just shoot one of the Toms, this was not to be. I jokingly said to my grandson "which one do you want?" To which he replied "I want to *hunt* turkeys, not kill them in the yard!"

If I had left on time from work that day, we would have been able to *hunt* those turkeys. Instead, we watched the flock walk through the yard as we put our gear away. As we put away the shotgun my grandson proclaimed "Well, I guess I'll have to wait until the fall and get one then." •