

**Turkey**  
**April 16, 2018 New Mexico**

**Galatians 6:7-8 “Do not be deceived: you cannot mock the justice of God. You will always harvest what you plant. Those who live only to satisfy their own sinful nature will harvest decay and death. But those who live to please the Spirit will harvest everlasting life.”**



Deceptive decoys – or are these real birds?

I hoisted my heavy backpack and grunted with exertion. Just a couple months ago I felt back to health and strong as I hauled loads of meat from a big Barbary ram (Barbary Sheep 2018 NM) from the field to my truck; now I staggered with a backpack full of turkey. Although I hadn't expected to be carrying nearly 40 pounds on a turkey hunt, but I'm getting ahead of myself.

Two years ago I broke my nearly decade long turkey curse and bagged a whopper with my bow. Last year I had a few close calls but came up empty handed again. Pursuing turkeys with archery tackle is challenging to say the least. Despite having brains only the size of a walnut, these beautiful birds can see in color with 8 power vision. With eyes on the sides of their head they have 270 degrees of view; a slight turn of their periscope-like necks ensures they can easily keep an eye on everything within 360 degrees.

Nevertheless springtime was here and it was time for another shot (no pun intended) at beating a birdbrain on his home turf.

I scouted some places I'd hunted in the past and crossed a few sparse tracks but a general lack of sign. Likely the extremely dry winter and spring had affected their patterns as most areas were dry as a bone with very little greenery sprouting.

Robin and I went out for youth-only weekend, but her school workload allowed only limited time. In conjunction with blustery winds and heavy rain (which we desperately needed!) we didn't have any action and didn't hear any gobbling.

As the regular season commenced I headed out on my own; school and swimming practice forced Robin to stay home. One evening I heard a turkey gobbling but he wasn't interested in my hen calls. His gobbles faded away from me and I assumed he was heading toward a roosting tree for the night.

I quickly gathered my gear, including a pair of new ultra-realistic turkey decoys, and hustled after the sporadic, retreating gobbles in hopes of determining the vicinity of his roost for use another day.

I hiked half a mile, pausing often to cup my ears and listen until another gobble directed my course. I never laid eyes on the Tom but he must have eventually roosted because he gobbled frequently at dusk in a canyon below my last listening post. I vowed to return the following afternoon, hopeful he would move through the same area and hiked nearly 3 miles in the dark back to my truck. Along the way I crossed a few fresh elk tracks and my headlamp illuminated the eyes of a herd of deer.

The next day was blustery, not uncommon for spring turkey season, which made it hard to hear the siren gobbles of love-struck turkeys. I would only be able to hen call and listen for gobbles during lulls between gusts, but set out to for the area I had heard the Tom the prior evening.

With plenty of time to get set up, I placed my deceptive decoys about 15 yards from a thick stand of oak brush in which I cleared enough room for me to sit with my bow. To further cloak my ambush I strategically placed logs and branches in front of me. With my bow loaded with a head-lobbing broadhead tipped arrow and standing at ready it was time to begin calling.



I felt nearly invisible with Sitka SubAlpine camouflage

I had to wait several minutes before the wind slowed enough to project my hen calls with any hope of being effective. I was counting on the Tom wandering within earshot and being intrigued enough to approach and see my decoys. The plan was that any Tom fooled within visual range would be irritated when he saw the half-strut Jake (immature male turkey) decoy "showing off" near the submissive hen and strut in hot, ready for a fight for dominance.

The wind whipped through the trees, dampening my hopes of attracting a bird. Each time it slowed to a low breeze I yelped plaintive notes on my turkey call. Although the wind

was irregular, I was able to call roughly every 5-10 minutes. I heard one faint gobble after about 45 minutes, but I couldn't tell from which direction it originated.

I called when the wind lessened but didn't hear any further gobbles. I passed the time by reading a book on my telephone and periodically scanning the area. As evening loomed I was conflicted with emotions: on one hand I had hope the Tom would pass through the area to roost, and on the other I felt time slipping away along with my chances.

Suddenly I caught movement out of the corner of my eye and slowly turned to see not one but two mature turkeys had arrived! They hadn't made a peep but were showing off and acting tough beside my Jake decoy; feathers puffed up and tail fans displayed!

I eased my hand to my bow, drew and released an arrow at the most aggressive Tom, who was pushed up against the deceptive fake. When the arrow struck his noggin he dropped as if poleaxed.

The second Tom immediately jumped on top of his fallen comrade without missing a beat. He wasn't overly antagonistic, but proceeded to march in place as if he'd been the one to take down the boss.



Second Tom standing on the one I shot, next to the Jake decoy

I had heard of this type of thing occurring on hunts, as macho male turkeys and even hens constantly harass each other for dominance; hence, the term "pecking order". I had never witnessed it and the few times I have shot a turkey with others around, the remaining birds all made a hasty retreat. Likely the realism of my new decoys and the blustery background noise helped fool the second turkey.

In amazement I slowly loaded another arrow and drew again. I either rushed the shot, flinched a little or the bird moved his head just as I released; perhaps all three. Regardless the missile zipped harmlessly past his head. Besides wincing slightly he seemed unfazed and continued to stomp the first bird. The deception was further enhanced when the "dead" bird gave a few twitches "like a chicken with his head cut off".

I had no more head-loppers, but silently reloaded a standard broadhead and came to full draw. I forced myself to take extra time to carefully aim and squeeze the trigger and was rewarded by dropping the second bird in his tracks!





Two dead birds where they fell by my Jake!



View from my blind to my setup and the aftermath

I was in shock. Only once in the past 20 years of turkey hunting have I managed to kill two birds in a single season. The limit is two birds with visible beards; typically Toms, but occasionally hens grow sparse beards too. Back in 2006 I killed Tom and the Bearded Lady, but those were on separate days; I'd never had a chance at two at the same setup.





Bearded bird #1 with my head lopper arrow



Both birds had respectable beards and spurs, but the real trophies will be in the pan

Both birds were mature with long beards (a hairy broom resembling a horse tail that grows from the chest of mature male turkeys) and inch-long spurs (pointed daggers above their feet that they use for fighting). The first bird had longer spurs and a shorter beard, while the second had a longer, thicker beard but a spur only on his left leg. Regardless, the trophy in my book is what can be put in a pan and these two birds will make several awesome meals for our family.

I snapped some trophy photos as the evening sun set their iridescent feathers ablaze, and then loaded them into my meager backpack. Turkey decoys are bulky by themselves and

I never dreamed that two mature birds would be added to the mix. I ended up loading the big toms inside my pack and lashing the decoy carry bags to the outside for a bulky, lopsided, jumble of a load. I grunted and hoisted the load to my shoulders, which brings me to the beginning of my story. At least I “only” had to carry my awkward cargo 3 miles to the truck – what a suffer fest! I’m sure my audience won’t give much sympathy, so I’ll quit “complaining” and simply relish the moment.

My deceptive Jake decoy certainly made fools of these two hotheaded Toms this spring and they reaped death. May each of us avoid being deceived likewise.



What are two birds in the hand worth?!

God Bless,  
Carl