

Turkey(s)
April 2015 New Mexico

Hebrews 11:6 'And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.'

Robin wrapped up her 2014-2015 season and friends asked what was next. With little time to rest on her laurels, it was straight into turkey season!

Not yet used to Robin being a hunter, I'm thankful for a friend's reminder that youth-only turkey season occurs the Friday through Sunday prior to the date ingrained in my mind: April 15 - Tax Day and standard Turkey Season.

We made a few scouting forays to areas where I've hunted turkeys in years past and found tracks and droppings. One likely meadow was littered with tracks and seemed worthy to sit and call.



Hiking to our location – with new boots!



Lizard sunning on a neat fossil-filled rock

Friday would be impossible with school and swim practice. Robin had a math placement test Saturday morning, which restricted us to an afternoon attempt; but it would be better than nothing. Robin elected to try her crossbow rather than shotgun. Robin was lethargic during our hike in. By the time we settled into our makeshift blind it was later than I had hoped, but I let out some yelps as Robin refueled on mac & cheese and sliced strawberries. We alternated between snacking, reading and scanning for birds; our ears straining for a gobble.

We heard a deer snort an alarm nearby, and plenty of songbirds sang and flitted, but the turkeys, if there were any, remained silent.



After an hour I wondered if our afternoon would result in nothing more than reading in the fresh air, although it was thoroughly enjoyable.

Suddenly I glimpsed turkeys moving silently through the sparse brush to our left. Our decoys were spread 10-yards in front of us: 2 hens and a Jake (young male). Robin quickly readied her crossbow and I scanned for beards (necessary to be legal). It was a group of 4 Jakes, all with visible beards. I whispered range readings to Robin and reminded her which aiming dot to use.

The Jakes didn't show much interest in the decoys and simply pecked for sprouts and insects as they meandered around the small meadow. I screamed "Shoot!" in my mind a half dozen times, but knew Robin would only pull the trigger when she was ready. At one point the small flock moved to our right and Robin had to scoot all the way onto my lap in order to keep them in her scope, but before she

could shoot they moved so that branches from our blind obscured any shot. One bird came within 10-yards, but all we could do was freeze and watch him through the vegetation until they meandered away.

Despite turkey hunting the prior year, this was Robin's first close encounter with these beautiful birds and she was able to study them within spitting distance. Wild turkeys are a far cry from barnyard fowl and are infinitely more impressive than the fat, naked, pen-raised stock that fill the supermarkets at Thanksgiving and Christmas. Once you see a "real" one, it's easy to understand why Thomas Jefferson recommended them over the bald eagle as our National symbol.

We whispered about the close call before returning to our routine, hopeful of another chance. I asked Robin why she didn't shoot and she said they kept moving and she couldn't line up on one, plus she had enjoyed watching them and wasn't quite ready to pull the trigger.

Having hunted turkeys for years, many of which ended with no bird in the pan, I knew our encounter was special and as much as we could hope for. An hour later Robin told me she was beginning to get chilly and was ready to head for home. I checked my watch and suggested we sit tight for another 15-minutes before calling it a day.

With no further action, we de-cocked her crossbow, put her broadhead-tipped bolt back into her quiver and began organizing our gear inside our hide. Suddenly I spotted more turkeys coming from the same direction as the first group! Doh – we had been caught flat-footed. Slowly and quietly I began to cock her crossbow. The safety mechanism makes a resounding "click" and the entire process is anything but quiet. Robin whispered "freeze" each time a bird looked our way, and incredibly I was able to load her weapon and get into her hands without spooking them.

Robin carefully followed the turkeys as I scanned them with binoculars to confirm visible beards, as the group again contained only Jakes; it may have even been the same group of four.



Soon they approached our decoys and were well within range. I was just preparing to let out a cluck to stop the birds when the previous deer snorted behind us. The Jakes stood at attention craning their necks toward the unexpected sound. I whispered for Robin to shoot and her bolt instantly streaked toward her target. The hit bird darted out of sight around some bushes, while his comrades trotted off.

Turning to Robin in disbelief, I hugged her tightly. It seemed that the Lord was even using the deer to help her! We quietly crept to inspect her arrow and evaluate the hit. The broadhead was packed with feathers and flesh, and the fletching was smeared with blood: we were confident of a fatal hit. Robin pointed in the direction where the Jake had run and stated "He went right behind that bush". We followed his route and found him less than 15-yards away. Her first turkey was down.



I'm not sure who's getting to be more famous: Robin or stuffy Clarice

After trophy photos Robin nonchalantly declared "Now that we have a Thanksgiving turkey, let's come back tomorrow and get one for Christmas!" Robin expected to pick up a second bird much like swinging by the grocery store. Although after her big game season, I can't fault her perspective.

I loaded her bird into my pack and stuffed much of the miscellaneous gear I had carried up into hers and we began our trek for the truck. Robin chatted excitedly and her feet danced along the path; her prior lethargy completely forgotten.

The Jake weighed just shy of 13 pounds on the scale. I carefully skinned the bird and saved the beautiful feathers for future craft projects or a display. Robin envisions creating some sort of Japanese fan with the tail feathers.

The next morning Robin competed in a kids triathlon at University of New Mexico campus: 1-mile run, 3-mile bike and 200-meter swim. Again we would make the best of it with an afternoon outing. Her race went well and we refueled with pasta and pizza at Saggios before heading for the mountains.

We set up exactly as before, complete with snacks and books to read, and settled in quickly since Robin knew exactly how to help arrange things, including the decoys. Robin began digging into the snacks immediately after we were seated, and I began calling. An hour later I glimpsed a turkey approaching along the same route as the Jakes had the day before. I quietly nudged Robin and she readied her crossbow, but the bird never came into view. Somehow he had disappeared. Ten minutes later he still hadn't showed. I surmised maybe it was

the same group of Jakes and they recalled one of their comrades disappearing after feeding near my strutting Jake decoy, so were a little frightened. I quietly sneaked over and removed the Jake, leaving the two hens. We relaxed a little and resumed our calling routine.

Half an hour later the turkey popped into view farther down the meadow and immediately locked onto our decoys. He was a good Tom, but after craning his neck our way, he suspiciously retreated into the brush. Initially I was surprised at his alarm, as we had been very still and quiet. I turned to Robin and immediately realized that she had left her camouflage facemask down after snacking. Her shining face had likely given us away: lesson learned.



With nothing to lose, and recognizing that this was a mature bird ready to take on a strutting Jake, I quickly replaced the decoy and tried to fool him into thinking that he had simply mistaken Robin's face for a turkey. I dropped back beside Robin and let out several yelps and gobbled with my mouth. Less than five minutes later the Tom peeked out for another look and immediately puffed all his feathers in a display of dominance. He strutted towards our decoy spread as I maneuvered the video camera. At 20-yards he paused to assess the situation and I whispered for Robin to shoot.



Still photo from video clip with Robin's arrow at his chest just prior to impact

Her arrow flew true and walloped the bird. He took 3 flapping jumps and collapsed. I'd say Robin's shopping trip worked out just as she planned! I was in disbelief that Robin had pulled another rabbit out of the hat. We again snapped plenty of trophy photos and it was apparent that this Tom was much bigger than her Jake. He ended up tipping the scales at 19-pounds and sported a long beard and good spurs: a trophy in anyone's book. One of my favorite photos is of Robin straining to hoist her bird long enough for me to snap several photos.



Trophy Tom



Snap the photo; this Tom is heavy!



Great job!



It doesn't get any better

I have hunted turkeys for something like 15-years and only once managed to kill two birds in one season. As if to drive home the difficulty of this feat, I went on to hunt every day I could spare during the regular season and although I had a few close calls, I came up empty. I even let Robin and Clarice tag along a few times!

Ah well; if I had to choose between me bagging a turkey or Robin, I'd let her have them every time. What an amazing kickoff to the 2016-16 season. Robin drew tags for deer and oryx, so there's a good chance that you'll be hearing more from us this fall.

Thanks and God Bless,
Carl and Robin (and Clarice)