

Finding the Roost-patterning turkeys

Written by

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OUTDOORS GUIDE

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Even though Northwestern Ontario appears to be still in full fledged winter, with mountainous snow banks everywhere, believe it or not... spring is coming! And once spring finally appears, with it comes one of my favourite outdoor spring activities; turkey hunting. Each spring I travel to Southern Ontario to hunt wild turkeys, a venture that more and more northern Ontario residents seem to be taking part in each year.

With growing turkey populations across Southern Ontario, there are great opportunities for hunters to get in on some great spring turkey action, as well as turkey hunting opportunities in nearby states like Minnesota and Wisconsin. I hear of more and more turkey hunters from Northern Ontario each year, making the foray to chase spring gobblers, and once you've done it once, you will see why. It is some of the most addicting, exciting hunting you can do.

Now this may seem a blatantly obvious statement, but one of the most important things you need to do to hunt turkeys, is to find turkeys... shocking I know. Now on one hand this does mean finding properties that hold numbers of birds, but specifically finding the birds you plan on targeting, and where they are hiding out. Patterning and roosting turkeys is one big step towards a successful hunt. Knowing the routes they may travel, the areas they feed, and very importantly, where they roost. In a perfect world you'd find out where birds are roosted at the night before your hunt, and plan your hunt around this; setting up your hunt hoping to bring birds in off the roost, or to intercept them after flying down on their way to feeding areas or in search of hens.

Finding where birds are roosting can be a great start towards making a successful hunt. This is something you can do during your hunt, as well as in the preseason if possible, learning where birds are routinely roosting. If you can discover roosting areas that birds have been regularly using, you'll have pretty good odds that birds will continue roosting there during the hunt unless they get disturbed or scared off. If you're doing some scouting, looking for droppings, feathers, or scratchings in the dirt around wooded areas are good signs birds are roosting above.

When it comes to roosting birds the evening before a hunt, typically they will fly up shortly before dark, so you need to get out into your hunting areas and try and locate birds. In saying that, you need to be cautious when doing this, as it could be more harm than good if you end up spooking birds while trying to roost them. I like to try and locate birds in fields or open wooded areas feeding before flying up before last light. Carefully walking field edges, or ridges around fields or in open hardwoods, glassing with your binoculars can be a great way to locate birds feeding along field edges right before roosting. Walking trails through hunting properties calling and listening can be good too, slowly making your way around, keeping alert at all times to locate birds, and to avoid spooking them. If you can locate birds feeding like this right before dark, I like to watch them and see where they enter the woods; odds are they will be roosting nearby. Depending on where this is, I may try and get closer and listen to see if they can be heard calling or flying up, or enticed to call, if I can do so without spooking them. You often will hear some commotion when birds are flying up, noises like cackling or wing beats, indicating that the birds are headed to the roost; this is especially noticeable if you have a large flock of birds roosting.

As far as calling to locate birds goes, the idea is to call and provoke a bird to gobble back, giving up his location, and giving you an idea where to start in the morning. There are lots of options you can use when trying to call to roosted birds, and you may have luck with a variety of different calls on different days. Some people like using turkey calls to get a response from a gobbler, and some don't, but it can be a matter of preference. Using a gobble call or some clucking on a slate call can elicit a response, but there are times when birds will not respond, and it's also a call you don't want to overuse and wise birds up to the call.

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Turkey tracks on a bridge.