

SCOUTING: Hunters must know where turkeys go

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gobble is only part of the equation,” Max explained. “People need to know where turkeys go when they hit the ground. When the weather starts warming, turkeys start strutting even if they aren’t gobbling. Look at the ground to find fresh scratchings and strutting marks. Strut marks are the best signs turkey hunters can find. A strutting gobbler is thinking of breeding. An area with strut marks is exactly where people need to hunt.”

Strut their stuff

Gobblers like to strut in open areas where the girls can see and admire them. They commonly go into food plots created for deer and other open areas. Many land managers regularly burn tracts of property as a management tool to clear out underbrush and promote new green growth. Burned areas offer hunters outstanding places to bag turkeys. Also look for hens. If a spot attracts hens, gobblers probably won’t be far away in the spring.

“Freshly burned areas are good places to hunt turkeys,” Max advised. “Many people think they need to wait until that spot greens up, but that’s not true. In south Alabama, a burned clear-cut is the best turkey habitat around. That’s just a giant food plot for them. Burned woods are extremely open. Turkeys like that because they can be seen strutting from a long ways. I concentrate on creeks or branches running through a burned area that might make a good turkey roost.”

Even in a thoroughly burned area, people can usually still find enough cover

to make good hiding places, especially around streams. Pick spots with shadows and green vegetation, which helps break up a human outline. Nothing spooks a bird like a human face shining in the sun, but shadows can make movement harder to detect. In addition, hunters can also usually find fire breaks around burned areas that allow them easy access to hunting spots when walking in the darkness.

On public lands, hunters might want to select three or four potential areas where they can set up on opening morning. Someone else might beat them to the first or second spot, so later arrivals need to make alternative plans. Also, since most people hunt the easiest places they can reach, try to find less accessible spots to hunt.

Listen from on high

“Some people like to get in a high spot and listen for birds,” Max said. “I have had more luck focusing on one particular gobbler. If I can find where one turkey wants to stay, I focus on killing that individual bird rather than trying to hunt a flock of turkeys. If a person is in the spot where a turkey wants to go, that person doesn’t need to be a champion caller. It’s all about setting up where that turkey wants to go.”

After setting up in a good spot, stay there. Hunting turkeys requires significant patience and perseverance. While sitting still waiting for a bird to appear, hunters can easily grow bored. Nothing alarms a gobbler faster than an impatient hunter moving at the wrong time.

Contact Max at 251-282-6256 or via email at doug-max1956@gmail.com.


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