

## Tom's Big Tom

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There is a story about an old country preacher who preached one morning about confession of sins. "Brothers and sisters" the preacher pleaded; "ya must confess ya ever sin; ya caint hold nothin back from dey Lawd. Nothin!"

Well sir, that sermon make a big impression on Mr. Jim Bob who with convicted and heavy heart rushed to the front of the church, yanked the microphone from the preachers' hand and began a lengthy confession. He confessed to having affairs with just about every woman in the congregation and to make matters worse he was naming names. When he finished there was a deathly silence in the church, gaping mouths hung open, and women started weeping. The old preacher took the mike away from Jim Bob and said,

"Brother I don't believe I'd told dat."

It was opening day of the 2009 spring turkey season and I had spent most of March scouting at every available opportunity and my success had been very good. I had located pre-dawn roost of at least half dozen big gobblers. My best friend and long time hunting partner Tom Kirker and I were headed for a choice spot at the Jeffery Wildlife Area located three miles north of Belvue, Kansas.

Tom had made the trip from his home in Topeka the night before so that we could get an early morning start. I had put up two camouflage blinds several days in advance so that the turkeys would get use to seeing them and had checked on them just a couple of days earlier. We left my house at around 3:00 a.m. the plan being to get in quietly, get set up and in place way before the first tree call. The temperature was a chilly thirty-two degrees. Everything seemed to be going as plan until we got to Belvue. There the main road was closed for repair which meant an extra three mile detour to get back to the original road by way of what use to be the old Oregon Trail. This accomplished we proceeded to our chosen location.



**Tom Kirker with his 24 pound Eastern**

The area was a small glen (located in a secluded nook near an old homestead) with a short field and a small shallow running creek. It was surrounded by Red Cedars, tall oaks, honey locust, and adequate under brush. Because it was still dark and Tom and I didn't want to use any lights if possible it took us a good twenty minutes to get the decoys (one jake, one hen, and one strutting gobbler) set up and take our places in the blinds.

I had carefully placed the blinds in what is referred to as the buddy system which just means that I put the callers' blind a good twenty to twenty-five yards behind the shooters' blind. I did this in the event the turkey would hang back out of shot my thought was that if the bird did hang back even though he would be out of my range he would be well within Tom's.

Now the waiting set in and believe me it was cold. Around 4:30 a.m. I used the hoot tube to give an owl call and it was met with a gobble. At 4:45 a.m. I gave a soft tree call and at 5:15 a.m. I gave the fly down and beat the ground with an old turkey wing to simulate the flight of a big bird to the ground. We counted at least three gobblers in the area. I did some scratching on the ground and made a gobble. It was answer by an aggressive tom. At 5:30 a.m. I did a yelp with alternating putts, purrs, and cuts.

The battle of patience was on as one big gobbler played a verbal game with me. He wanted to come in but he wasn't quite sure. That bird over the span of the next three hours did a complete three hundred and sixty degree circle around us. Once I caught sight of him standing on a bluff over looking our layout; checking to see if everything was alright. I will say that tom never cease to talk to me. Finally at around 7:30 a.m. he spotted the strutting B-mobile (Primos) and that's all it took. He developed an attitude and it was mean. As he headed down the bluff toward the shallow creek crossing I whispered to Tom from my blind, "Get ready here he comes." By this time I was completely chilled to my bones and I could hardly keep my teeth from chattering. I thought, "Surely he can hear me."

The next sound was him breaking water as he crossed the small stream and then sight of his massive head rising above the crest of the bank. As soon as he had ascended he went into what I refer to as the "mean raptor walk" and headed straight for B-mobile. His demeanor seemed to say, "I don't know who you are or where you came from but I'm fixing to kick your butt." B-mobile (the strutter) was only about fourteen yards from Tom's position and by this time Tom was so chilled that he could hardly hold his gun steady. That big turkey came right up to the decoy and Tom waited until he had a shot but because he was so close and he was having difficulty keeping his gun still he missed the first shot causing the bird to panic and start to run. My hunting partner would recover however and take the bird on his next shot.

We had worked hard for this long beard but it had been worth it. The bird weighed twenty-four pounds even, had a ten inch beard, and one inch spurs. It was time for us to gather our gear and head into Belvue to the *Cottage Inn* for some eggs, bacon, and hot coffee.

*Side note:* If you find yourself hunting anywhere near the Jeffery Wildlife Area you have to make time to eat at the Cottage Inn. Rick Vanderbilt has owned and operated the Inn for almost thirty years now. He does not believe in small portions and his prices are more than reasonable. Trust me hunters are very welcome.

While we were eating breakfast and getting warm a couple of hunters came in.

“How’d you do?” asked one the hunters.

I said, “Oh my buddy got a big one but it took us a good three hours to get him to come in.”

Tom added, “Yeah, can you believe that I missed that bird at fourteen yards?”

One of the men said, “Fourteen yards heck I missed one this morning at five yards and he’s still out there.”

I looked at my good friend Tom, winked, and then turning to the other hunter I said,

“Brother I don’t believe I would have told that.”

A few slaps on his back to dislodge the food Tom was choking on and all ended well.

