

BUSTED!

By: David McNeal

I've had a lot of strange things happen to me in the turkey woods over the years. I've had my decoys stalked by coyotes and bob cats. I had five deer walk right through them; once in the wee hours just before dawn I felt something's hot breath on my face only to turn and find myself eyeball to eyeball with a young buck and I even had a raccoon inform me not so politely that putting my big butt down against a log he called home was not to be tolerated. I've had squirrels on numerous occasions sit on a limb next to my blind and cuss me out in squirrel language for invading their private forest.



Any turkey hunter who has been at it for long can tell you that there isn't a one of us that hasn't at one time or another been busted by the birds we've been waiting on. Usually it simply a matter of being out waited and just when we're sure they're not coming we stand up just in time to see them bolting for the underbrush swearing under our breath, "if I had just stayed put another five minutes."

Yours truly has been busted on more than one occasion and I know deep down I'll be busted again but I sure as heck hope it doesn't happen like it did recently.

My story begins on a beautiful Friday morning last April (the 29th, 2011). I was looking forward to the area I planned to hunt that day because a good friend of mine had bagged a nice hybrid just that past week and he told me that there were still plenty of gobblers left in the area. He also said that he had learned, "he who waits longest wins." Well I worked my way down an old rutted farm road where my son-in-law and I had a bird answer us only a couple of weeks before but for some reason had failed to come in. My thought was that if I closed the distance to where he had first answered us he might be encouraged to come close enough for a shot. I picked a nice area near a food plot but far enough inside the tree line that he would have to come looking for me. Settling with my back against a Cottonwood tree; slate in hand I started my yelp.

Not long after the first yelp sequence he answered at a distance but I could tell he was interested. After a few cuts his gobbles got louder and closer confirming that he was on his way. I waited a good five minutes with no response and then did another cut. His response was immediate; loud and very close. I dared not call again.

His last response had been to my right at what I guess would be a good thirty yards but because of the thick underbrush I could not spot him strain as I might. All I could do was lean forward peering; hoping to catch a glance of his movement.

THAT movement never came.

I was just about to lay my slate aside and pick up my shotgun; still wondering what had happened to him; fully expecting him to appear any moment to my right when from my left side; right in my ear from behind the tree I was sitting against, a howzer went off causing me a near cardiac condition and a dropped slate and primer.

That old bird had somehow without me hearing (of course my spouse is constantly reminding me that I need a hearing aid) and came up behind the very tree (What are the odds?) I had chosen to sit under. The whole incident had me checking my pants for contamination and Mr. Tom doing a NASCAR last lap back in the direction from which he had come.

I was BUSTED; game OVER!

In all my years of hunting the big bird I have never had a bird get closer and I am hopeful that the encounter will go down in my journal as a once in a lifetime experience. And yes (I see this question coming) if a turkey dies of heart failure you DO still have to tag it.