

The Easiest Spring Bird I Ever Harvested

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Sometimes things just happen. There is no real explanation for them and they spring upon you like some long-awaited; well deserved remuneration from above. They happen so quickly that they seem in a way surreal.

The spring of 2010 was unlike any I have hunted with the birds being less than confident; hanging just out of shooting range; refusing to come in or gobble. So when I passed through Belvue, Kansas one morning heading for the Jeffery Public Hunting area, I really didn't expect an easy hunt. In fact the first bird that my long time hunting partner Tom and I had taken in this area took us three long and teeth chattering hours to bring in but that's another story.



Me with the easiest bird I ever called.

On this particular morning as I was traveling to one of my favorite sites (a small glen surrounded by conifers and tall oaks) I found myself considering the possibility that I might not even be able to get a location on a bird. Most of the birds thus far this season had refused to answer anything except a pre-dawn shock call. Once the birds flew from roost they clammed up tighter than a 12 gauge shell crammed into a 20 gauge barrel.

Going through my head were the different possible scenarios that might change things for me, "What if I started with calling softly or should I call aggressively or even call at all?" While I was still considering these options thinking more of how to get a bird to come in rather than keeping an eye on my driving, out of the corner of my eye I caught a glimpse of a lone gobbler walking along the edge of a harvested cornfield head down; picking and scratching. The bird was a good three hundred yards from the road; never slowing down I drove another half mile and pulled over.

My immediate problem was getting back to where I knew the bird was without being seen. I wanted to get as close as I could because experience has taught me that the closer I can get the better my chances for success. I decided that I would use the cover of a tree line which ran adjacent to the road and make my way to a small secluded cornfield I had spotted about a quarter of mile (or half way) to the field which held the bird. About ten minutes into my journey I hit a temporary snag, a creek. Fortunately the creek wasn't too deep and I had little difficulty forging it. Upon cresting the far creek bank my luck took a turn for the better, a small well worn tractor road I assume used by the farmer for getting back into the small secluded field which was my destination. In less than five minutes I had reached the field and for a moment I consider trying to get closer but the openness between fields quickly dismissed that thought. It would have to be here.

The road I came in on wound neatly right into the open field; with trees all around it. It took me a couple of minutes to locate a shooting point which allowed me to get a clear view of any avenue of approach from three sides. Ten minutes later I had the decoys (a hen and a strutting gobbler) in place, a small burlap blind set up and I was settled in ready to start calling.

The bird was a good quarter of a mile off. Would he respond? Was he lonely enough? Would he come that distance? There was only one way to find out and that was to make a call; so I took a breath and let out a yelp on my box call. There was an immediate and aggressive response. I waited a full two minutes and answer with an assertive cutting call; again immediate response; the bird had already closed to within half the distance.

Now I was absolutely determined not to respond until he asked for it. It didn't take long maybe less than a minute before he vehemently let loose with two long gobbles. I responded with some contented putts and purrs and then I simply place my call on the ground and picked up my gun and waited. His last response told me that he was extremely close and I knew that it would only be a matter of minutes before I would see him coming along one of the edges of the field.

Turkeys never do what they're suppose to and while I was waiting for him to come up the edge of the field for a shot at thirty yards or so, he suddenly appeared off my left at less than fifteen yards; his eyes glued to the strutting decoy. I quickly swung my gun and fired but he was too close and my shot (about the size of a golf ball) sailed right past his head and slightly to the right; recovering I quickly corrected and fired a second shot; this time my shot though still small found its' mark and the bird collapsed.

Examining the bird reveals a two year old with a seven and a half inch beard and three quarter inch spurs. The bird weighed in at nineteen pounds even. My watch indicated that the entire event from the time of the first call until my actual shot was an incredible twenty minutes. There is no doubt coming from a man who is use to an hour or more of calling time that this bird would go down in my journal as the easiest spring bird I had ever taken. Why? Who can say? I would take an easy bird in the fall but that's a whole nother tale.