

Turkey tactics



BRAD TRUMBO
UPLAND PURSUITS

A heavy fog hung in the pines, cloaking the 40-some birds high above my brushy ground cover in their evergreen roost. Turkeys had flocked up for winter, and like clockwork entered their routine of roosting in a small pine strip along a creek bottom.

Soft yelps and clucks wafting from the canopy were barely audible above the babbling water, but evolved into a boisterous cacophony as the sun fought to tear through the fallen ceiling. Having never mastered the art of calling turkeys, I sat quietly, awaiting the birds' vacation from roost.

As visibility increased to about 30 yards, the unharmonious ruckus from overhead fell silent. Had I moved? Had they heard me? My mind raced with the paranoid cogitations of a turkey hunter familiar with failure. Moments later, the pines erupted. Turkeys spewed from all angles in unison, hidden entirely by fog; their heavy wing beats showering the understory with the mist deposited among the pine needles. A short glide carried them to a nearby wheat field where tender green sprouts topped the breakfast menu. Waiting and glassing patiently allowed the birds time to feed back into the timber. Time to make a move.

Believe it or not, turkeys that flock up in the fall are far easier to hunt in brushy and timbered cover than in the spring. You can get away with movement that would never fly when trying to call that lovesick tom. I sprang from my seat beneath the shelter of a pine and weaved into the timber along the edge of an old road.

Movement through a tangle of downed pines, rose and service-berry prompted me to dive behind a large tree trunk while three Rio Grande hens emerged onto the old road clearing. My peering around the trunk caught the birds' attention but merely held their gaze, allowing me to raise grandpa's old Ithaca model 37 pump to shoulder and settle on the biggest old hen. A single shell of 2¼-inch, four-shot steel secured my prize, destined for a baking dish with garlic, spices and local bacon.

Sound like a "once in a blue moon" opportunity? That was my assumption, given my inability to remain concealed from these birds



Brad Trumbo/Contributed Photo
Brad Trumbo with a colossal fall Rio hen, taken with his grandpa's Ithaca Model 37 pump.

during spring. But year after year I've filled turkey tags in the same general area, waiting in the dark for the birds to leave roost and making a move on them just as I would a mule deer buck, using terrain and vegetation to close the distance.

Wild turkeys are not native to Oregon, and our local Rio Grandes were introduced in 1975. They thrive in the Blue Mountains foothills because the narrow riparian strips with a mix of trees and shrubs flanked by dryland crops resemble their native south-central U.S. and Northern Mexico habitats. These thick covers also provide ample concealment for slipping in on a flock of fall birds.

Although not expressly stated in literature, turkeys often select conifers for roosting, and having a basic understanding of fall habitat and forage preferences is more than half the battle for fall hunting success. Spotting a flock is relatively easy, and in my experience, they generally remain within close proximity to their preferred winter food sources.

Fall calling tactics include busting up flocks and calling them back with hen yelps, but sitting and calling are two activities that I have failed to master. Spot-and-stalk is far more productive for those of us unable to remain still, and is highly effective on flocks of 10 or more birds as safety-in-numbers appears to be a mindset for the Rio Grande turkey. Hens have pegged me nearly every time I move in on the flock, but a quick stand-still allows unsuspecting turkeys to filter by. The lack of alarm from the oblivious bystanders typically puts those on alert at ease, and I have even seen a flock ignore the panicked "puts" of



Brad Trumbo/Contributed Photo
Brad Trumbo took this Rio Grande jake upon sneaking through junipers to intercept the feeding bird.

those who have me pegged.

The fall turkey season in Oregon's Northeast hunting units is in full swing and runs through Jan. 31, 2022, on private lands. One turkey of either sex can be harvested. If you are looking for something new and exciting and have never tried spot-and-stalk turkey hunting, get out and give it a shot. You are guaranteed to enjoy the challenge, and fall quickly in love with the Rio's rich hues of copper, emerald and auburn, the tail fan tipped with an elegant caramel band, and the exceptional table fare of this beautiful wild turkey.

Brad Trumbo is a fish and wild-life biologist and outdoor writer in Waitsburg, Washington. For tips and tales of outdoor pursuits and conservation, visit www.bradtrumbo.com.



Brad Trumbo/Contributed Photo
The Rio Grande's plumage reveals strikingly beautiful and varied hues.

Honors:

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Van Wyck concluded his Eastern career third on the program's all-time list in tackles for loss (48.5) and sacks (24.5).

"Each one of them brings something different to the table," Camp said. "For offensive coaches to have to game plan around not just one, but two, is kind of unthinkable at times."

Both players earned a share of Frontier Conference Defensive Player of the Year after stellar showings in 2021.

Having recruited both out of high school, Camp emphasized the impact of DeLong and Van Wyck beyond just their performances on the gridiron.

"It's something to be able to watch them grow on the field and as men," he said. "For (Van Wyck) to be able to graduate and for Sage to almost be done with his master's, it's just a really good story for both of them."

Van Wyck and DeLong concluded their careers as two of the best defensive linemen to play for Eastern Oregon. Upon leaving the program, the two players set the standard for what Camp hopes Eastern can achieve in years to come.

"Those two guys are true pillars," Camp said. "I'm super proud of them."



Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group, File

Defensive lineman Chase Van Wyck recovers a fumble near the goal line in Eastern Oregon University's matchup Sept. 25, 2021, against the College of Idaho at Community Stadium, La Grande. Van Wyck was named Frontier Conference co-defensive player of the year alongside teammate Sage DeLong.

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