

Wild Turkey Hunting Today
Lesson Plan / Instructor Guide

COURSE TITLE:

Wild Turkey Hunting Today

INSTRUCTIONAL GOAL:

Students will learn the basics of how to hunt wild turkeys and some biology of wild turkeys.

INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES:

Upon completion of this block of instruction the participant(s) will be able to:

1. Correctly name the three subspecies of wild turkeys found in New Mexico.
2. Identify at least three examples of wild turkey sign.
3. Identify at least four items to include in your turkey hunting vest or pack.
4. Know what an omnivore is and be able to describe.
5. Know what a predator is and be able to describe.

INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS:

PowerPoint lecture.

HANDOUTS:

New Mexico Hunting Rules & Information Booklet.

<http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us/home/publications/>

COURSE DURATION:

Approximately 30-40 minutes.

CURRICULUM REFERENCES:

New Mexico Wild Turkey Management Plan 2013-2018. New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, Santa Fe, New Mexico

<http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us/download/conservation/species/birds/management-recovery-plans/Turkey-Management-Plan.pdf>

Talkin' Turkey Spring & Fall. Instructional CD. www.quakerboy.com

Wild Turkeys, All About Turkeys: National Wild Turkey Federation. Retrieved March 17, 2020.
<https://www.nwtf.org/hunt/category/all-about-wild-turkeys>

ADDITIONAL READING MATERIAL:

New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, Wildlife Notes, Wild Turkey.
<http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us/download/education/conservation/wildlife-notes/birds/wild-turkey.pdf>

Wild Turkeys of New Mexico. <http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us/download/publications/wildlife/Wild-Turkeys-of-New-Mexico.pdf>

SAFETY CONSIDERATION:

Don't use loaded firearms around the home.

EQUIPMENT, PERSONNEL, AND SUPPLIES NEEDED:

Laptop (with presentation uploaded), projector or screen, jump drive with presentation or uploaded to computer, power cords (if needed), extension cords (if needed) and New Mexico Hunting Rules & Information Booklet. <http://www.wildlife.state.nm.us/home/publications/>

NOTE: Please check out additional reading material and check out references for more material to look over.

TARGET AUDIENCE:

Beginning to advanced level hunters.

COURSE PREREQUISITES:

None.

EVALUATION STRATEGY:

Written or Oral Final Test.

AUTHOR & ORIGINATION DATE:

Storm Usrey, March 17, 2020.

REVISION / REVIEW DATE(S): N/A.

REVISED / REVIEWED BY: N/A.

CRITERION TEST:

1. Three examples of wild turkey sign to look for while scouting can be _____, _____ and _____.
2. Four items to include in your turkey hunting vest or pack can be _____, _____, _____ and _____.
3. The three subspecies of wild turkeys found in New Mexico are _____, _____ and _____.
4. Are wild turkeys a _____. A) Carnivore, B) Herbivore, or C) Omnivore.
5. Give your definition for a predator.

CRITERION TEST ANSWERS:

1. Feathers, tracks, scratching, strut marks, dusting bowls, turkey sounds and feces.
2. Turkey calls, locator calls, knife, water, food, hunting license, toilet paper, decoys, flashlight, GPS, batteries, insecticide, rope, saw, first aid kit, water purification system, map, compass, orange flagging, medication, Thermancell, facemask, gloves, rain jacket, extra clothing.
3. Rio Grande, Merriam's and Gould's.
4. C. Omnivore.
5. Example- Predators naturally feed or prey on others during any stage of their life cycle.

COURSE OUTLINE:

- I. Introduction
 - A. Give name and title
- II. Give Goals and Objectives
- III. Wild Turkey Basic Information
 - A. Talk about wild turkey numbers
 - B. Talk about wild turkey subspecies
 1. Talk about distribution of subspecies

2. Talk about distinguishing features between subspecies
- C. Go over definitions
- D. Go over differences between gobblers and hens
- IV. Talk about 6 P's of turkey hunting
 - A. Pre-Season Scouting
 1. Find turkey sign
 2. Find turkeys
 3. Find water and feed sources
 4. Learn land status
 5. Talk with game warden, BLM & Forest Service
 6. Talk with locals
 7. Obtain written permission for private land
 8. Study the proclamation
 9. Talk about turkey sign - tracks, droppings, strut marks, dusting bowls, turkey scratching and feathers
 10. Wild Turkey Lifestyle
 - a. Spring
 - b. Summer
 - c. Fall
 - d. Winter
 - e. Predators
 - B. Pattern your shotgun
 1. What gauge to use

2. What choke to use
 3. Type of sights
 4. Shot size
 5. Shoot at bull's eye
 6. Shoot at turkey head targets
 7. Practice
 8. Pellet count
 9. Other weapon types
- C. Prepare Equipment
1. Total camo
 2. Turkey vest or pack
 - a. Turkey calls
 - b. Locator calls
 - c. Turkey call supplies
 - d. Flashlight
 - e. Mask and gloves
 - f. GPS
 - g. Spare batteries
 - h. Compass
 - i. Map
 - j. Sharp knife
 - k. Thermacell
 - l. Insecticide

- m. Toilet paper or baby wipes
- n. Hunting license(s) & permits/stamps
- o. Turkey decoys
- p. Saw
- q. First aid kit
- r. Space blanket
- s. Water and purification system of some sort
- t. Food
- u. Signal mirror
- v. Rope
- w. Waterproof matches
- x. Lighter
- y. Fire starting material
- z. Extra shells
- aa. Medication
- bb. Rain jacket / extra clothing

D. Practice your turkey calling

- 1. Lots of calls (diaphragm, box, pot style, tube style, wing bone)
 - a. Buy CD/DVD and practice, watch YouTube clips
 - b. Can imitate gobbles, yelps, clucks, putts, purrs, cackles, whines, kee-kee run

E. Patience

- 1. Locate gobbler's on roost
 - a. Gobbler's attract hens to them

2. If gobbler goes silent, no worries
 - a. Don't over call and have patience
 - b. 10-15 minutes can go long ways
3. Know lay of land and turkey behavior
 - a. Know where obstacles are located
 - b. Hunting turkeys in rain
 - c. Field turkeys
 - d. Turkeys and elevation
 - e. Stay put for mid-day birds
4. Turkeys senses (sight, smell, hearing)
5. Find zones (strut, feeding, loafing, roost)
6. Locate multiple gobblers

F. Patience

1. Don't ever give up
2. If other hunters on a gobbler go find other turkeys
3. Stay ethical and have fun

V. Thank you

COURSE CONTENT:

Course Introduction and Overview

You may ask why turkey hunting is important. Wild turkey hunting is a fun sport and important to the economy of states as hunters directly pay for wildlife conservation (85% or more) and many small communities depend on the economy hunters bring to their communities.

My goal for this presentation is not to make you expert turkey hunters, but to help you learn the basics of hunting wild turkeys. At the completion of this presentation you will be able to: 1)

correctly name the three subspecies of wild turkeys in New Mexico; Identify: 2) at least three examples of wild turkey sign; 3) at least four items to include in your turkey hunting vest or hunting pack; 4) that wild turkeys are an omnivore; and 5) what is a predator.

Instructor Notes:

Let students know that this presentation will give them valuable information in regards to wild turkeys and hunting them as well.

Wild turkey basic information

Wild turkeys once numbered approximately 20,000-30,000 at the beginning of the 20th century in the United States. Now turkeys have rebounded in their numbers to approximately 7 million across the United States. The reason for their success is because of efforts from state wildlife agencies (habitat management and the ending of market hunting) and volunteer efforts from folks like the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTf). Transplants have played a huge part in this success. Wild Turkeys are even found in New Zealand because of transplants. Wild Turkeys are one of the greatest stories on conservation in the history of wildlife management. The definition of conservation is the wise use of our natural resources.

There are six species of wild turkeys (actually two species and five subspecies found in one species). The six turkey “species” are: Eastern, Osceola, Rio Grande, Merriam’s, Gould’s and Ocellated.

Instructor Notes:

Show where turkeys may be found on distribution map. Show where turkeys are found in New Mexico (Merriam’s, Gould’s, Rio Grande). Show differences in pictures of each “species”; this will mainly be looking at feather tips of the species. Eastern and Osceola have dark brown, “Rios” have tan, Merriam’s are white to buff in color and Gould’s are pure white. Talk about wing difference in Osceola; they have more black in the barring of their wing feathers. Gould’s are the largest of the turkey subspecies and do not follow Bergmann’s rule/law: Bergmann’s rule is an ecogeographical rule that states that within a broadly distributed taxonomic clade, populations and species of larger size are found in colder environments, and species of smaller size are found in warmer regions. When talking about Gould’s wild turkey in New Mexico make sure students know there are currently only two hunting opportunities for them. One auction and one raffle winner. Proceeds benefit the management of the Gould’s wild turkey.

Before we proceed it is good if we go over some definitions. The definitions are:

Gobblers: Male of species.

Hens: Female of species.

Jakes: Young males that are not a year old.

Poults: Young turkey.

Beard: Modified feathers that come out of the chest. They are present on gobblers and some hens have them (up to 10-20% of a hen population in an area or region can have beards present).

Spurs: Found on leg region of males and used in fighting when establishing pecking order in flock.

Roost: Tree or structure used at night by turkeys for resting or sleeping.

Waddles or caruncles: Skin on neck region of turkeys. Caruncles (fleshy bumps) are found on ocellated turkey's head.

Instructor Notes:

Go over pictures of gobblers and hens and talk about definition words. Show where spurs, beard and waddles are located. Talk about feathering on head of hens and show bearded hen, show red, white, blue head of gobbler and talk about safety issue of carrying any item that is this color. Show differences in fans of mature and jake gobblers.

Talk to students about how turkeys are living, or surviving, during the four seasons.

- Spring is breeding season; gobble activity increases when breeding season is started by the photoperiod; dominant gobblers do most of the breeding; gobblers do tolerate each other but have a pecking order; hens have a pecking order too.
- Summer is when hens lay 8-10 eggs. They lay one egg a day until the nest is ready to be set; after 28 days baby turkeys emerge from eggs, capable of flight within a few weeks to month, begin roosting in trees and learn by imprinting mother.
- Fall is when turkeys form their large flocks; gobblers mostly with gobblers and hens and poults with each other. Jakes will usually run together as will hens that have not had any poults (like 2-year-old Merriam's hens). All flocks have a pecking order.
- Winter is survival mode; searching for food and they are still in flocks.
- Predators of wild turkeys may include bobcats, coyotes, mountain lions, foxes, raccoons (eggs), coatimundi (eggs) and raptors. Snakes can be a potential nest predator too (eggs). Various predators exist throughout the year on wild turkeys.

Six P's of Turkey Hunting

Six P's of turkey hunting includes: 1) Pre-season scouting, 2) Pattern your shotgun, 3) Preparation of equipment, 4) Practice your calling, 5) Patience and 6) Persistence.

Preseason Scouting is about going out and finding:

- Turkey sign (tracks, droppings, feathers, dusting beds, sounds)
- Look for turkeys, they can travel to different areas during different times of year
- Find water (dirt tanks, streams, rivers, lakes, springs, wildlife drinkers)
- Feed sources (different during different seasons; green grass in spring and summer months; insects in spring-fall months and important for poult growth and egg development; mast like acorns or juniper berries or piñon nuts are key in fall and winter months, various grass seeds also in fall and winter months). Wild turkeys are omnivores and eat both plant and animal material.
- Learn the land status; utilize maps and GPS units.
- Talk with local conservation officers, BLM staff and Forest Service staff for recommended areas to scout and hunt.
- Talk with locals (local ranchers, business owners, mailman, etc.)
- Obtain written permission for private land.

- Study the proclamation (know what licenses, stamps, permits may be required, what units are open, laws about shooting from the vehicle or road, hunting over bait, use of calls, legal shooting hours and weapon restrictions). There are different laws in different states and tribal lands.

Instructor Notes:

Show pictures of tracks, droppings and discuss how to sex turkeys based on this. Gobblers have larger tracks and J shaped droppings. Hens have smaller tracks and droppings are spiraled. Show pictures with strut marks, dusting bowls, scratching and types of feathers (wing, tail, body feather and down-type feather).

Patterning your shotgun is a key element. There are many different makes and models so hunt with what fits your needs. Some people prefer a 10 gauge while others prefer a 20 gauge, but most use a 12 gauge. Make sure to use full, extra full or super full type chokes. Turkey chokes are essential as the pattern of the shot will be very tight and you want most of the pellets to hit the small target of the head and neck of a turkey. Use #4 to #6 type shot out of your shotgun. Make sure to install rifle open sights if your shotgun does not have any or put on a scope (if possible and this will help with patterning your shotgun). Using today's modern chokes and turkey loads your shotgun will be shooting like a "rifle" so you must shoot and treat it like one. Shoot at a traditional bull's eye target at first then switch to a turkey head target.

- When starting out to pattern your shotgun, shoot #7 bird shot up close like at 10 yards. Adjust your sight from this range until you are hitting your target accurately.
- You can then shoot turkey loads from 15-45 yards or further and see how your gun patterns with different loads. Use 2 ¾, 3 or 3 ½ inch shells if your gun will shoot them.
- Try to get a minimum of 7-10 pellets in the small head and neck area of a turkey target.

If you shoot archery equipment or muzzleloader shotguns you must also spend time at the range to become efficient with your hunting weapon of choice. No matter what you plan to use, always practice safely! Eye and hearing protection are a must with shotguns.

Always check local game laws to assure you are shooting legal weapons and ammunition types.

Prepare your equipment. Make sure you wear all camouflage as a turkey can see color (this includes camo gloves and facemask). Go through your pack or turkey hunting vest and make sure you have turkey calls, locator calls, facemask and gloves (camo), compass, map, GPS unit, sharp knife, food, water (water purification), Thermacell or insecticide, flashlight, toilet paper, ammunition, decoys, rain jacket and/or additional clothing and license/permits/stamps.

Instructor's Notes:

Have students give you ideas of other items to include in your pack for survival uses. These may include: first aid kit, fire starting material, rope, space blanket, waterproof matches in a waterproof container, signal mirror and shelter material.

Practice your turkey calling. Turkeys are very vocal animals year-round and have a variety of calls. Make sure to get you a CD/DVD of actual turkey calls and practice them on your calls. You can find a lot of great sources for turkey calling on YouTube as well. The sounds they make include: yelps, gobbles, putts, purrs, cutting, whines, kee-kee runs and cackles. There are a variety of calls so buy a few and give it a try. Recommend a box type call or pot style (friction call) to start off with. Then they can go to diaphragm or tube-style calls (air operated) from there. Also, practice using your locator calls to make gobblers shock gobble. Locator calls could be owl hoots, crow calls, coyote howlers and elk bugles.

Have **Patience** when turkey hunting. The best way to hunt turkeys is to locate gobblers when they fly to roost (this is called putting them to bed). The next morning you want to set up as close as possible to the roost tree (usually dictated by terrain and cover) without alarming the turkey or giving up your position. Before fly down, the gobbler will be vocal (usually) and this is when you can imitate a hen by giving out some soft tree calls or soft yelps. Only give out a few, even if the gobbler is gobbling a lot and then go silent. You can do a fly down cackle and use your cap to simulate flapping wings of a turkey flying down out of the tree. At this time stay quiet. Once the gobbler flies down you can call more and use a variety of different calls if you want. Being quiet or very limited calling is usually the better option. If a vocal hen is with him then imitate her. Get her fired up. There are lots of options here. Yelping and cutting can be very productive for getting a hen or gobbler fired up and ready to come in.

If gobbler goes silent, don't worry. He may be with hens (usually the case), may be coming your direction or may have been spooked. Give it plenty of time and at least 15 minutes, or more, before moving to set up again.

You should know the lay of the land from your pre-season scouting, so use this to your advantage. Set up where you know the turkeys will be heading. Where are they feeding, watering, strutting and roosting? If you go this information before the hunt you are more likely to be successful than not.

- If you encounter rain, head to the nearest field to the turkey's location. Turkeys will head to clearings or fields when rain starts.
- Turkeys who are in agricultural fields appear to be tough to hunt as they are in the wide open. Use hunting blinds and decoys to your advantage. Set these up in areas the turkeys frequent the most in the field or open area.
- Always try to set up above or at the same level of a turkey. It is more difficult to get turkeys to head downhill.
- If the turkey goes silent and you know that he stays in the area you are hunting then stay put. Don't be surprised if he shows up in your lap after a few hours of courting the ladies.
- Turkeys can see and hear very well. They cannot smell you. If they could, they would be almost impossible to hunt. You cannot fool their eyes or hearing.
- Locate multiple gobblers before season and mark these on a map. Believe me, this can pay off in a big way when hunters are everywhere and some of your spots are being hunted or one of the gobblers does not want to cooperate.

Instructor's Notes:

Tell the class a hunting story you may have encountered while out in the field where you left an area to allow others to hunt the spot or area because they were there first. Have good ethics.

Be **Persistent** and don't give up! If other hunters are hunting a bird leave them to it and go find another one. This is being ethical and moral. Always assume a turkey you hear in the woods is another hunter and practice safe hunting.

Conclusion Summary

Thank the class for their time and ask if there are any questions. Encourage them to go out hunting and explore nature in the future.