



Turkey Hunting 101



Why Hunt Turkey in Georgia?

- Thanks to conservation efforts, restocking and modern wildlife management, Georgia is home to approximately 300,000 birds and sustainable huntable populations exist in all of Georgia's counties.
- The revenues generated from licenses and equipment sales are a major source of funding for wildlife and habitat restoration projects.
- Examples of turkey conservation projects include- Population surveys, food plot management and habitat development.

Turkey Hunting Regulations

- The Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR) will propose dates for hunting seasons. The DNR Board has the final approval of the season's dates.
- Georgia's total bag limit is three gobblers (male turkeys) per season.
- To hunt turkey in Georgia, the hunter must possess: (1) a valid hunting license, and (2) a Georgia Big Game License (note: with the purchase of a sportsman's license, the Big Game License is included) and (3) a harvest record.
- The turkey hunting regulations are based on taking a number of birds that will still allow for a sustainable population and provide hunting opportunities for the most people.

Correct Identification of Turkey Gender

- There are many references, in print and online that can be used to assist determining gobblers from hens.
- Correct identification of turkey sex requires some practice and experience.
- There are many factors to consider:
 - Plumage patterns
 - Color
 - Size
 - Shape
 - Voice

Breast Feathers



- Gobblers (males) have black-tipped breast feathers and appear almost black at a distance while hens have buff-tipped breast feathers and are more rusty or buff colored.
- Both sexes have body plumage that shines with iridescent shades of bronze, green, and brown in the sunlight, but this iridescence is much more noticeable in gobblers.
- Jake refers to a young male.

The Head and Caruncles

- The head of an adult hen (female turkey) is partially or completely feathered whereas the male's head is comparatively bare. Also, the warty caruncles and wattles are much more prominent on males than females.



Gobbler Legs

- Gobblers have legs, or tarsi (the bare part of the leg between the foot and the "knee" joint), that average one- and one-half inches longer than those of hens. This trait is particularly obvious when they are standing together. Gobblers also have larger feet and toes than hens.
- Adult gobblers have conspicuous spurs on their legs. Hens usually don't grow spurs, but have only tiny, rounded scales in their place. Hens have been known to have spurs, and spur-less gobblers have been documented as well; however, these occurrences are rare.

Gobbler Beard

- Gobblers have “beards” which are actually modified feathers. The beard is hair- like in appearance and protrudes from the breast. Using a turkey's beard to distinguish sex is not always reliable because beards occasionally occur on hens. Beards on hens are usually thinner than gobbler beards and seldom exceed eight inches in length. (Bearded hens are capable of normal reproduction).



Turkey Habitat

- Found Statewide
 - Enjoy hardwoods and conifers
 - Weeds and grassy openings
- Turkey enjoy the areas beneath trees and plants which produce seeds and nuts.
 - In fall and winter, turkey particularly enjoy hardwood stands
 - Insects and grass seeds are food for young turkey (poults).

Turkey Patterns of Movement

- Follow a predictable schedule.
- Diurnal: active sunrise – sunset.
- Come off the roost at or near sunrise and moving to a feeding area. After feeding, the birds will move to a safe, sheltered area where they will continue to forage and interact. Late afternoon, the birds may return to the feeding area and then return to the roost at sunset.
- Remember, legal hunting for Turkey is $\frac{1}{2}$ before sunrise and $\frac{1}{2}$ hour after sunset.

Preparing to Turkey Hunt

- Early season scouting will lead to a better chance of a successful turkey hunt. Locating suitable habitat, identifying food sources, observing birds and paying attention feeding and roosting patterns will improve the hunter's chances.
- The morning of the hunt, the hunter will need to be in position well before sunrise with decoys set (if they are being used). Most birds will have moved from the roost to their feeding area by mid-morning.
- Afternoon hunts may not be the ideal option, but they do provide another hunting opportunity that can be successful if the hunter has spent the mid-day scouting and locating birds.

What Can I Hunt Turkey With?

- Shotgun
- Typically, 10 gauge or smaller with shot no greater than 3 ½ in length with no. 2 lead shot or smaller.
- Chokes: Modified choke (tight group) Full choke (even tighter group)
Make sure to test your gun's patterning with the ammo you intend to use before you hunt.
- Effective range, choke pattern and shooter's ability must be considered.
- Primitive weapons such as bows, crossbows and muzzleloaders are also legal for hunting turkey.

RIFLES ARE ILLEGAL

Turkey Hunting Gear

- You, camouflage clothing, shotgun, legal ammo and a turkey call.



Turkey Calls and Decoys

- Calls and decoys can be used to help draw a turkey within range of a waiting hunter.
- Use caution when other hunters are in the woods.
- There are many on-line resources that can help a first-time turkey hunter learn to operate a turkey call. (Avoid the overuse of a call, as this can be recognized as artificial by older gobblers).
- As a turkey hunter progresses in experience and hunting opportunities, other specialized equipment may be added to their inventory including many different types of calls and decoys and specialized shotguns, chokes and shot shells.



Camouflage

- Turkeys are very proficient at spotting potential dangers on the ground, so camouflage is probably more important than with any other type of hunting in Georgia. Camo should include a head and face covering as well as gloves.
- It is dangerous to have any red, white or blue showing, as these are colors found on the heads of turkeys (That's what other hunters are looking for).
- When turkey hunting in areas where other hunters may be present, it is advisable to wear hunter orange when moving from place to place.

Where Can I Hunt Turkey?



Public Land

- There are many opportunities to hunt public lands in Georgia. A full list of the WMAs and other government owned properties where hunting is allowed can be found in the Georgia hunting regulations.
- DNR Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) are public lands that provide many turkey hunting opportunities. Nearly all of Georgia's WMAs have turkey hunting opportunities. Certain WMAs have special requirements/regulations that control the timing, or the number of hunters allowed to participate in a scheduled hunt.
- The thing to keep in mind about these areas is that they are all owned, managed and regulated by some entity, and that a hunter who takes advantage of the hunting opportunities on public lands must abide by the regulating entity.

Private Lands

- Requires permission in order to hunt.
- Includes regular landowners and hunting clubs.
 - Permission must be gained in writing.
- Private lands offer exclusive opportunities to hunters that are sometimes not offered on Public Land.
 - Georgia has several managed private properties where there are opportunities to hunt through a guided hunt.

Outfitters

Outfitting services manage properties for turkey hunting and provide opportunities to hunters for a cost.

Pittman Robertson Act

The excise tax is set by law at 11% of the wholesale price for long guns and ammunition and 10% for handguns. It is paid by manufacturers, producers, and importers and applies to all commercial sales and imports, whether their purpose is hunting, sport shooting, or personal defense. This tax is handled by the Department of Treasury, which turns the funds over to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) for apportionments to states.

How are Pittman-Robertson Funds Distributed to States?

- \$8 million is dedicated to Enhanced Hunter Education programs, including the construction or maintenance of public target ranges.
- \$3 million is set aside for projects that require cooperation among the states.
- One-half of the excise tax collected on handguns is set aside for Basic Hunter Education programs.
- The remainder of the trust fund is then divided in half with 50 percent apportioned to states based on the land area of the state in proportion to the total land area of the country. The remaining 50 percent is apportioned based on the number of individual paid hunting license holders in the state in proportion to the national total.

Wildlife and Sport Restoration Program

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program (WSFR) works with states, insular areas and the District of Columbia to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, their habitats, and the hunting, sport fishing and recreational boating opportunities they provide. The Division of Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program provides oversight and/or administrative support for grant programs.

How can I learn more about Turkey Hunting?

- There are many books, websites and pod cast dedicated to the subject.
- Find a friend or family member who is an experienced hunter and talk to them or see if they will be a hunting mentor for you.
 - Videos and shows on television and online
- By visiting <https://georgiawildlife.com/LearntoHuntFish>

Learn More About Turkey

You can find more information about Turkey management, biology, and more at:

<https://georgiawildlife.com/turkey-info>