

Turkey Sunrise

By Charles Hovater

Editor's Note: The following story unfolded on the property of Mr. and Mrs. Leslie McCollough, long-time TREASURE Forest owners in Colbert County, where Mr. Hovater and his grandson were guests.

Each year, the state of Alabama holds a youth turkey hunt the weekend prior to opening spring turkey season. I was looking forward to taking my oldest grandson, Parker, turkey hunting that weekend.

With the clock set for 4:00 a.m. and a restless night's sleep with dreams of 20-plus pound gobblers running over each other, coming to our calls... the clock brought me back to reality. The morning was just right as we walked through the woods to where we knew the turkeys would be. The lonesome sound of a whippoorwill rang out in the darkness as we approached the field we were going to hunt.

While we sat in the pre-dawn darkness, we heard an occasional owl hoot. As the aqua-green eastern sky started lighting up, a cardinal started his courting ritual, along with the sad cooing of a mourning dove. Then all of a sudden, we heard it... the gobble of a turkey. A second, then a third gobbler joined in. The grin on Parker's face said it all. Now it was up to me to call him to the gun.

Before long, all the other birds joined in for a musical serenade. What a morning! God really knew what he was doing when he created the spring of the year, everything coming to life after a hard cold winter. Soon we heard one of the turkeys fly down. I soft yelped and he immediately answered me with a huge double-gobble. The next gobble was much closer. Once again, a second and third turkey gobbled also. Then we saw movement to our right, and it was a jake with two hens. I told Parker to hold off until a good gobbler arrived.

Since he had never shot one, I could see the disappointment on his face. Shortly, the gobbler was a hundred yards

behind us, strutting back and forth, but he would not come within firing range. Time passed and he still would not come within range. After a while I realized he was hung up and was not coming in. Aware that we needed to move on him and relocate, I was afraid that the two of us would make too much noise and spook him.



Photo by Johnnie Everitt

Left to right: Les McCullough, property owner; Parker Wright; and Charles Hovater, author of the story.

Finally around 9:30 a.m. he left for parts unknown. I just knew that I had messed up by not letting Parker kill the jake since it would have been his first bird. As the 10:00 hour approached, we heard an awful gobble and a half "kee kee" from what sounded like a lonesome teenage turkey. Sure enough, here came the jake with two hens, back to the field. I was not going to make the same mistake again and not let Parker get his first turkey. I called it up within gun range and like a pro, ol' Parker downed the bird. Words cannot describe the jubilant feeling we shared.

After a few hugs and high fives, we checked out his prize. To our amazement, the turkey had three beards; pretty remarkable for your first turkey. My season was already made with this one

hunt... if I did not get a turkey all season, it was already a great one. That night, as all turkey hunters do, I kept turning the hunt over in my head. What a morning! But I could not quit thinking about the gobbler who wouldn't come in...

I called and asked Parker if he wanted to try again in the morning. Of course, he was ready. Morning broke much the same

the next day. What a beautiful sight... all of the trees and flowers coming to life, and all God's creatures trying to outdo the other. The eastern sky started turning the same aqua color when Tom sounded his dominance. I made a soft tree yelp and immediately, he answered. I had Parker situated about 15 yards in front of me, watching the field. When I did a fly-down cackle, Parker nearly jumped out of his skin. He thought I was knocking a snake off myself. I clucked and purred and did an occasional yelp, and old Tom just couldn't stand it. He

came pretty fast within gun range and for the second time Parker found his mark.

Two turkeys in two days... my season was complete!

Walking over to his prize, we could hardly believe our eyes... a 19 pound, 9 ounce turkey with a 10-3/4 inch beard and 1-1/8 inch spurs. Boy, were we happy! I hope every turkey hunter can share this experience of taking your children or grandchildren turkey hunting, feeling the jubilation of downing a big gobbler between the two of you.

As this hunt ended, I could not wait until the next weekend... the opening of the 2007 spring turkey season when I could experience another turkey sunrise, hear the call of the wild one more time, the roar from the king of the birds... the magnificent wild turkey. 🦃