The history of the wild turkey dates back to primitive times. It was a source of food for the Indians of North America and was an important factor in the survival of the Pilgrims when they first came to the New World. Benjamin Franklin had wanted the turkey to become the national bird of the United States, instead of the hostile bald eagle. But for lack of popularity as a beautiful bird and for its supposed lack of intelligence, the turkey never became the national symbol.

O. Fred "Brownie" Veatch, a retired conservationist in Missouri, told The Chariton Collector a little about the smart old bird that was once thought to be one of the most ignorant animals on the face of the earth.

"In 1960, when the Department of Conservation became a non-political organization, we probably had about 3,000 turkeys in the state of Missouri and they were all located in the southern part of the state. We started out with 21 birds in Adair County; they were brought from Ozark and Taney Counties in south Missouri. Shag Grossnickle and W.O. Mackey stocked the birds in Thousand Hills State Park in 1960. It was 17 degrees below zero when they let them out. They had been used to the warmer temperatures of south Missouri and it was quite a change."

Adair County opened its first turkey season in the spring of 1967. That year there was a reported 35 turkeys killed. Fourteen years later, in 1981, 948 birds were killed.

"There are five different species of wild turkeys," Brownie said. "The Mexicana and Rio Grande birds are found in the northern part of Mexico. The Osceola bird, named after the Seminole Indian Chief, is found in Florida. The pine forests provide the main habitat for the Rocky Mountain Bird. Then, finally, the oak and hickory forests in Missouri are the habitat for the Sylvester strain.

"The male Sylvester will average somewhere around 21 to 22 pounds. The female is a lot smaller, in the neighborhood of 12 to 15 pounds. The Sylvester's breeding season usually starts around April, and is usually governed by light, but temperatures have a little to do with it, too. The female will stay fertile for about 56 days and will go through the breeding process every morning. So if something happens to the gobbler, she will still be able to lay fertile eggs.

At the end of the breeding season, the female will skip a day, and then at daylight the following day she will lay her first egg. Every day after that she'll lay another egg an hour later. For instance, if she layed an egg at 7 o'clock one morning then the next morning she'll lay an egg at 8 o'clock and so on until it gets too late; then she will go back and start at daylight again. This is what makes your spring hunting good. That ole' gobbler won't have anything to do while she is laying, so he'll just move around and gobble, and that's what makes him vulnerable to a call. The female will

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**Four Turkey Calls**

By J. V. Scofield

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Screw holding plate to box so it can move back and forth on the box

Elastic string holding top plate to box

Chalked area

Rub chalk on edge of box under plate. Rub top plate lightly over top of box to imitate turkey call.

Strike dowel against slate to make turkey cluck.

Diaphragm

The diaphragm call, which is used in the mouth, can imitate almost all of the turkey calls when used correctly.

Wood

Chalked area

Rub chalk against the top edge of the bottom piece of wood until lightly covered and then rub top piece of wood longways against chalked area to imitate the sound of the turkey.
usually lay a clutch of 11 to 12 eggs or more. The hen doesn't set on them or incubate them until she has laid all the eggs."

Since the first spring turkey season, the art of calling in the wild turkey has been a growing sport for many Missourians.

Long-time turkey hunters Emery Lawson of Connellsville, Mo., and Gerald Blacksmith of Novinger, Mo., have been hunting wild turkeys since the first spring season opened in Adair County. They shared some of their experiences with The Chariton Collector.

For many turkey hunters like Emery and Gerald, most of the fun and sport in hunting the wild turkey is being out in the woods and calling the smart old bird. Gun range is usually around 40 to 45 yards. Emery shared one of his stories with us.

"The best hunt we ever had we never got him. I called that turkey and he went around and around and, Gerald, you had your gun ready three or four times."

"Yeah," Gerald agreed, "for almost an hour."

Emery continued his story. "We was huntin' in Putnam County, and we heard one gobbler right at the head of a holler. Well Gerald went up ahead of me and I stayed behind and called. There was a little ridge on both sides all the way around us. I called that turkey; he was about a 100 yards off. He'd come up one side of the ridge and then circle around to the other side, and he did this several times. Three or four times Gerald had his gun ready to shoot cause it was that close. We was an hour with that turkey, wasn't we? We must have been 25 yards from him and then he took off. We called him and he gobbled and then directly took off and never paid no more attention to us.

"He crossed the road and we went after him again and he never come back to us. Directly I said, 'He's gone to Lancaster, so let's just let him go,' " Gerald said.

For most Missourians there are two gun seasons for turkeys. One begins in the early spring usually around the middle of April and lasts two weeks. During this season a hunter can take one turkey with a visible beard each week of the season. Rarely will a female have a beard. The fall turkey season lasts two weeks, usually opening the latter part of October. It allows the hunter to bag one bird of either sex.

Various types of turkey calls are used to lure the turkey, and the hunter uses different calls in the spring than in the fall season.

"I have a whole drawer full of calls," Gerald said. "I made some box calls, one out of walnut, and I made one out of cherry. I made one out of a pill bottle. I cut a hole in the top and put a piece of rubber from a balloon in it; works real good. Not very loud but you don't have to call very loud, unless its windy. Those things can hear! I had one made out of the wing-bone of a hen, and it worked real good. I don't see why it would work any different from the wing of a tom, though. I think a lot of people are all wet about it; they hear that only the hen's wing-bone will work and they believe it." Gerald prefers to use his slate call in the fall season.

"I use this slate call. It's better for making the re-grouping call that young turkeys use. See, when a young group of turkeys are broken up, they make a 'pert, pert, pert' sound. This is called a re-grouping call. They all return to the place from where they scattered." Emery tells of how he used this method to kill his turkey one fall season.

"I was walking in the woods and saw a bunch of turkeys on a ridge over from me, so I just shot over there to scatter them. I sat down and I started using the re-grouping call and pretty soon some started coming back and I shot one."

Most hunters feel the spring season is more challenging than the fall because one is calling the mature gobblers in search of mates. In the spring the male turkey is extremely aware of the female's mating call and her location. The male turkey will answer her call with a gobble, trying to lure her to him. With a hunter this is not possible. The male will become suspicious and may circle around for long periods of time, investigating and waiting for the right moment to make his move. If there is any disturbance in her call it may spook him and you may never see him again.

On the other hand if the call sounds genuine he will slowly approach the call and he'll start to strut. The gobbler will ruffle up his feathers to show himself off. All during this time he is moving closer and closer. This is when delicate calling is an absolute necessity. A series of clucks and yelps are made to excite him. Sometimes a hunter will scratch the dead leaves to imitate the sound of an interested or feeding hen. If all of this is done right, a lucky and skillful hunter will get his turkey.

"I remember the first year I went a huntin'," Emery said. "I didn't know too much about it then. It snowed that day and it was pretty cold. I went up on top of this ridge. I was just a standing around; I didn't know what to do. And then about a quarter down that ridge one gobbled. I just hid and started callin' and he gobbled again, and boy he was a lot closer. I called and every time he gobbled. Pretty soon I could see him through the bush, but I couldn't shoot, cause you can't
kill one through the bush. So I let out a little call and he’d just strut. Directly he went to going in the woods off this little road, toward this little opening. He got in the opening and I gave a little call and he just fluffed up big as a balloon. I had my shotgun loaded with Number 2’s and I filled him full, 17 pellets in the body. I was about the proudest guy there ever was with my first turkey.

These are only a couple of Emery’s and Gerald’s hunting stories, but they show how unpredictable a tom turkey can be. Sometimes he will call, and sometimes he will just saunter up to you. If you are not paying attention, he will see you before you see him.

People will tell you that you can’t kill a turkey in the rain, but Gerald discounts this. “You can kill them in the rain, don’t let nobody tell you you can’t. They’ll get out in the rain; I killed one four years ago. I crawled up on it, up this ol’ possum path, about 20 or 22 yards. When it took out and flew on a bluff I shot it. I seen it fall. I went down and couldn’t see it. It fell in a hole full of water and Emery carried it up for me. That made it weigh a pound more, it weighed 22 pounds.”

Thanks to Shag Grossnickle, W.O. Mackey, and the Missouri Conservation Department, northeast Missouri has made great progress in its turkey population. Next time you are out in the woods calling in that giant tom turkey, remember those people who made all of this possible.

### Number of Turkeys Killed in Adair Co. Since 1967

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Adair County ranked in the top 10 for the past few years.

Emery poses with the prize turkey he killed in 1976 (top photo), and (left) with one of the rifles he’s used for many years. Above, Gerald demonstrates the use of the slate call.