

MANAGE THE SILENCE.

Of the many challenges facing the turkey hunter, silence in the turkey woods causes the most mistakes. Silence erodes confidence and creates temptations to move, to call more frequently and louder, to fidget, to convince yourself that your set-up is lacking, and that the area you're hunting is devoid of turkeys.

Thankfully, our turkey populations across the U.S. and here in California have literally exploded to the extent that it's relatively easy to access areas, both private and public, with huntable numbers of birds. Assuming you've located a spot with turkeys, you don't have to be the best caller, set out the most life-like decoys, sport the latest camo pattern, or hear a cacophony of gobbles every time you hunt to sling a long-beard over your shoulder and walk triumphantly out of the turkey woods. However, being well equipped and proficient with your gear adds a level of comfort and confidence to try

what follows.



What will end in the most success time after time is your ability to endure silence. Anyone who has paid his dues hunting turkeys has experienced the glorious symphony of gobbles, clucks, cackles, and kee-kees at daybreak while the flock assembles, then scatters without coming within range of his set-up. Thus, begins the test many hunters will fail.

Faced with silence and the longer that silence persists, the greater the pervasive gloom tempts you into believing the birds will ignore your efforts to bring them in this day, or worse yet have left the area. You may be correct in your assumptions, in which case changing tactics by moving, calling louder, mixing up your calls, digging to the bottom of your bag of tricks, may work.

Nevertheless, in most instances turkeys ultimately get to decide the outcome of the duel by answering your call or not, by coming to investigate or not or just meandering seemingly randomly into or out of range. Behavior you think capricious

must be factored into your tactics when your assumptions of predictable behavior fail. Your ability to manage that silence, to maintain confidence, to stay put, to become a giant alert and patient ear and eye, and to know that strategy will bag more toms than bungling about, spooking and alerting those birds you've convinced yourself aren't within the county you're hunting.

It's truly rare to experience noiselessness while waiting out turkeys, but expect many hours of silence from turkeys quietly going about their daily routine. Many will be the times after literally two or three hours of your staying-put and alert, hearing nothing but hawk cries, birds twittering, doves cooing, wind rustling grass and leaves, mallards quacking, coyotes barking, crows cawing, there will be a cluck, a purr, a gobble, a flash of iridescent feathers, and you're suddenly in business. That phantom gobbler of your frustrated imagination struts or slyly sneaks into reality in your sights. It's been there all along; it's just a turkey, doing what turkeys do. All your waiting wasn't a decision to do nothing; it was a tough anguishing decision to do something even harder: overcoming doubt and succumbing to impatience.



PULL THE TRIGGER. YOU'VE MANAGED THE SILENCE!

-Don Black