

VFC2023-0001 - Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife Turkey Project
AU2024-1023-005 - Craig Zondag
March 20, 2023
Burlington, VT

Craig Zondag [00:00:00] Craig, Craig Zondag, I live in New Haven, Vermont. Just want everyone just to note the sunlight on the buildings out here and kind of on the, yeah, just in this moment, it's quite beautiful outside. Yeah, I grew up in Pennsylvania. And I didn't actually start hunting until I went to college at the University of Wisconsin. And I had developed a best friend who brought me into the ranks of duck hunting initially. And I thought if I ever hunted anything, it would probably be ducks, because I really like eating duck. And then an opportunity availed itself to hunt turkey. And the first time I hunted turkey was in Northeast Pennsylvania. And--well, let me just ask this question. And it'd be difficult to record this, perhaps, on the audio. But how many of you have ever fallen asleep at the trunk of a tree while you're turkey hunting? <laughter> That really warms my heart, thank you. <laughter> Yeah, I think there was about nine or 10 hands that were raised. Yeah, so my first time turkey hunting, it was, you know, got up early before sunrise and hiked up into this property in northeast Pennsylvania. And it was quiet, there was nothing. I didn't hear any gobbles out in the distance or anything. And of course, I fell asleep. And I did buy, I bought a turkey decoy. They had it, you know, 50, 75 feet out in front of me. And, but never heard anything, fell asleep, and then I nodded awake and looked off to the left, and there's a turkey, 15 feet from me, walking past my left shoulder. And the gun was just like laying on my lap, and I was like so startled, and that was my first turkey hunting experience. I went back the next year, went back to the same spot in fact, and I set up my decoy and again it was really quiet, no gobbles, nothing and I was doing my best to call using diaphragm call, and then all of a sudden out of my vision on the right hand side I saw something move in the forest floor. And it was a gray fox. And the gray fox started stalking my turkey decoy. 50 feet from the turkey decoy, this thing just rushes the decoy and just pounces on my decoy. Oh, that's the end of that one day. I'm sure there's no turkey around here. So I probably have more stories of not actually getting a turkey, but I'm I sure all of you do as well. And I think one of my favorite turkey hunts is the spring, particularly when spring migration is taking place. And spring ephemerals are coming up off the forest floor and just noting the phenology of those things from year to year. And I had this wonderful experience sitting at the base of a tree here in Vermont turkey hunting, where a male scarlet tanager just returned on migration. And I saw it up in the tree, and it landed less than five feet from me where I was sitting on the forest floor. And it turned over a leaf, how it knew there was a worm there, but it actually picked up a worm underneath the leaf it turned over, and then flew back up to the tree. And I just thought, that's a pretty magical moment. And I think the magical moments, it's not so much getting the bird, although I love cooking, and I could tell you all the different recipes I've made with wild turkey, they're just, yeah, it's one of the greatest joys and one of greatest gifts I think that we have. But all the non-hunting things, all the other wildlife experiences that we get to experience by being dressed in camouflage and not being noticed by a lot of other life out there and just having that moment to be in creation and give thanks, so thank you. Thank you. <applause>