

VFC2023-0001 - Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife Turkey Project
AU2024-1023-008 - Joshua Morse
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Burlington, VT

Joshua Morse [00:00:00] So is there anyone who's on the fence about telling a story? If you were a turkey, you would not cross the fence. But you're a human, and you can tell a story if you want. So I've got one queued up if we're at that point in the night. But if there's someone who's just trying to decide this is your invitation. <pause> Yeah, well, I have one last turkey story for us. So I started turkey hunting in 2019, not that long ago. And I had a couple seasons where I learned a ton. After my first season, my uncle called in birds for me down in Massachusetts, and I thought, "OK, I can do this." After my second season, I chased gobbling turkeys up and down and up and down in Richmond town forest. Never saw one of them. I was having doubts. And then my third season came around, and I had gotten permission to hunt this giant hayfield down in Charlotte that I would drive by all the time. And I cold called the landowner who amazingly remembered the turkey reintroduction. He remembered seeing the first turkeys that came up north and he said, "sure, you can hunt." I spent a lot of that third May out in that hayfield with friends, by myself. I got pretty familiar with the kind of flock of hens that would cycle through it. And I was pretty sure that I was hearing some gobblers in the early mornings, but I had not connected. And the season was winding down. And it was the second to last weekend of the season, and I was gonna be away the last weekend of the the season. And I did not feel like hunting, but I have this morning, and so I dragged myself out at 10 a.m. And I got to the field, the grass was really up to my waist, or at least up to thighs. There were kingbirds flying over it. I was exhausted. And I walked up through the tall grass. And then I fidgeted for like a half hour, so it's 10.30 at this point, trying to figure is it gonna be safe to take a shot? The farmhouse is back this way. You know, where can I reasonably sit? What are some good paths for turkeys to come through? By the end of my fidgeting, I'm pretty convinced that there's not gonna be a turkey in it for me today. But I wait 10 minutes, I put out my lone hen decoy, and then I yelp on the box call, and way down the field these two bright red heads stick up out of the tall grass. Which I can't really believe, but I give them another 10 minutes and I call again, and the two bright, red heads are, they've halved the distance. This is a very long field, so half the distance I know that I've still got some calling to do. But I'm thinking back to watching my uncle call a turkey across a field. I'm feeling like I can do this, and I'm seeing the turkeys starting to talk back to me. Their little heads are bobbling. I'm hearing them like kind of cautiously purring is what it sounds like. It's the third time I cluck and now they're 60 yards out. I can see that it's two Jakes and I can that they are sussing out my hen decoy, and they are thinking that something is not quite right. And the Jakes start to turn and they start to walk off into the tall grass. There's a little bit of a hummock in the field between me and the Jakes and soon they're out of sight. So I cluck again, I hear them purr. I know we're having a good conversation. I know they were interested in that hen decoy until they weren't, but I can't get them to come back. And then I have this strange feeling like, sort of like grace descending on me, where I think this is the closest I've been to a turkey since my uncle took me out. There's one more thing I can try, which is belly crawling through the tall grass, feeling awfully like one of those Jakes up to the top of the hummock in the field. And I poke my head out through the toll grass, and I look down the humick, and the two jakes poke their heads out of the tall grass and they look up the hummock. And it's this really strange moment for me where I think we're doing exactly the same thing, where these green, young creatures, and I'm a young hunter, these are first year jakes, and we're just trying to figure out, I'm trying to find something to eat, they're trying to a mate, and neither of us really is sure what's gonna happen next. So

I raise the shotgun, and I pull the trigger, and the safety is on. And the jakes cock their heads, and it's really clear that they are creatures just like me. We are thinking about what the other one of us is doing and trying to make sense of this, and I am having to choose one of them to kill one of them if I can get the safety off and if they don't scoot. And I do get the safety off, and they are just watching me, and I choose one them and I kill one of them. And there's a split second where I see the other fly off and I think oh "my god That's my first turkey that I've killed." And then from 10 yards behind them, there's this huge sound. And this giant tom lifts off out of the tall grass and flies away. <applause>