

THE REICH STUFF

The 130th Jake

by JJ Reich

Southern-state turkey seasons start several weeks prior to opening day in Wisconsin, so I always try to get down there for an exciting warm-up. This time, I was lucky enough to be invited to the Turley Ranch during the first weekend of April, for 2 days of chasing Oklahoma turkeys: where big-beef dinners, funny cameramen, annoying cow gangs, and hundreds and hundreds of jelly-headed birds await.

Turley Ranch is located in western Oklahoma, near the northern Texas border. The Washita River traverses 7 miles of the 15,000-acre cattle ranch, and it provides a pristine habitat for turkeys and other wild game. The bottomlands of the river have a thick cover of large trees, with many thickets and open meadows broken occasionally by a green field of rye, alfalfa and other food plots. From the river, the terrain slopes up quickly into red canyons and hills that become upland rolling native grasses with good cover and large cottonwoods.



OK, I'm Ready

The first morning was exciting for a reason other than shooting a big Oklahoma Rio: I had my chance at 15-minutes of fame. Larry Woodward, host of "Just Hunt TV," was also in hunting camp, and he offered to film my hunt for his show. Larry knew where there was a ton of birds roosted near a massive 40-acre food plot on the ranch, and he had a good feeling we'd have action.



At daylight, we both watched in awe as about 200 turkeys flew down across the huge field and flocked in the middle. My binoculars told me there were just a few-dozen mature toms in the congregation with many hens, but the large majority of the turkeys were jakes—actually about 150 jakes. Soon the birds escaped in the opposite direction of my Winchester Super X3 shotgun, and my chance for TV fame ran away as well. Although filming for the show was a bust, Larry and I were both surprised at how many young gobblers were in that field.

That afternoon, I was hunting by myself in a cow pasture near some roost trees, waiting some wild Rios to turn

off the light and come to bed. But instead, some Turley Ranch heifers caught me moving into their domain and came in to investigate. These young cows *would not* leave me alone. The annoying gang also inspected my TransFan turkey decoys. In this case, “inspected” means licked, kicked, pooped and pee on them. I took the hint, picked up my smelly, wet decoys and I went to sit in a new area—but with no luck.

The following morning I hunted the same huge food plot as the day before, but this time I was alone and I snuck much closer to yesterday’s hot spot. Massive amounts of birds flew down in the same fashion as before. This time, they sauntered closer to me, but still not close enough.

On the final evening of the hunt, I wanted to sit anywhere there was NO chance of beefy mammals defiling my decoys. A Turley Ranch guide told me of a huge group of jakes that had been loitering on the north end of grain field all-day long. Plus, there was a handful of toms with them too. His guess was that at dusk they would parade down the field to the southern end and roost in patch of hardwoods near the creek.

There was a finger of woods at the southern end in which I made my stand. After 4 hours of watching the huge group of turkeys through my binoculars and counting them (130 total), the guide’s prediction came true. The mass of black-balled birds came my way in one *long* line. My binoculars followed the Toms, but the longbeards always stayed shielded by the younger birds. I never had a chance at them, and they walked safely by.

Knowing there were plenty of jakes in the area (and not wanting to eat “tag soup”), I happily aimed at they last jake in the train and pulled the trigger. My Rio gobbler was no huge tom... but this Oklahoma turkey was definitely O.K. in my book.

I’m now saving my greenbacks to go back to the Turley Ranch and see how many of those hundreds of jakes are now eager 2-year-olds ready to come running to my calls. You can too; learn more about the Turley Ranch at: www.turleyhunting.com.

Editor's Note: JJ Reich is an outdoor writer who contributes product-related articles to several national magazines and websites. He is also the author of Kampp Tales Outdoor Adventures hunting books for kids. Learn more at www.kampptales.com.

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A wet gobbler hunt