

## GUIDE TO THE OUTDOORS FROM THE SHERIFF'S POSSE: SPRING TURKEY SEASON



*A Merriam Gobbler on alert, photo courtesy of Colorado Parks and Wildlife. Courtesy photo CPW.*

By Mark Rackay

REGIONAL-The Colorado Spring Turkey hunting season opens up April 8 and runs through May 21 for us on the Western Slope. According to estimates from the Colorado Parks and Wildlife, CPW, the turkey is thriving here.

Colorado is home to two subspecies of the turkey. One is the Rio Grande, which was introduced to our state in 1980. The Rio Grande lives mostly on the eastern side of Colorado, preferring river bottoms lined with cottonwood trees. The Rio Grande birds are often found in the farming areas of the plains.

The native turkey to Colorado is the one that lives in the Montrose area and is called the Merriam's or Mountain Turkey. This bird lives primarily west of Interstate 25, preferring the mountainous regions. The Merriam's likes open meadows and parks, oak brush and pinion junipers.

The turkey has excellent eyesight. It has been said that a turkey can see an arm movement at 300 yards, and from my own experience, I can attest to that. These birds are capable of flying up to 50 mph for short distances, and can run at 25 mph, to escape a predator.



*A beautiful Merriam Gobbler taken near Ridgway during the spring season. Courtesy photo.*

Spring is the mating season for wild turkeys. The courting begins in the wintering areas, when the birds are still flocked together. Snow depth and temperatures play a part in how soon the birds move up into their spring/summer areas.

Males, or gobblers, try and attract the attention of the females by strutting and fanning their tail feathers into a beautiful display.

Gobblers will fight off smaller males, called jakes, to try and keep the hens to themselves. The males use a variety of calls, the most popular being the gobble.

Once bred, the hens will take to the nesting site and begin laying eggs. The nests are usually located in the dirt, surrounded by vegetation, in an attempt to conceal the eggs. A hen will lay 10 to 12 eggs in her clutch during a two-week period. She will then incubate the eggs for 28 days until they hatch.

The newly hatched bird will be ready to leave the nest within 24 hours and begin feeding.

The young birds, called poults, will feed on insects, berries and seeds, while adult birds will eat anything from acorns to

small reptiles.

With the keen eyesight of a turkey, hunters must cover themselves in head to toe camouflage.

Gloves and a face covering are a must. If time permits, building a small blind out of natural vegetation will also help conceal you from these cunning birds. Staying perfectly still is the secret to success, as they can detect the slightest movement from long distances.

There are several types of calls available. The friction

calls include the box and the slate call. Mouth calls, which have a latex reed in them, are also widely used. A good caller will be able to attract a bird from long distances, but this takes much practice to become skillful.

Shotguns are the weapons of choice, as rifles are forbidden during the spring season.

Shot size must be No. 2 or smaller, and can be lead or steel. It is a good idea to pattern your shotgun before you go, so you know exactly where your gun shoots.

CPW estimates that the wild turkey population in Colorado exceeds 30,000, so we have a pretty good-looking season ahead of us.

Remember to bring a survival pack and extra warm clothes, as it is still winter in some parts of the high country. Until next time, enjoy the hunting season and good luck getting a gobbler.

*Mark Rackay is a freelance writer who serves as a Director and PIO for the Montrose County Sheriff's Posse.*

*For information about the Posse call 970-252-4033 (leave a message) or email [info@mcspi.org](mailto:info@mcspi.org).*

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