

## Wisdom of the wild turkey



### Outdoors

By Paul Zaenger

As the car coasts to a stop I see her. She's right in the middle of the road as visitors had reported. I get out and approached. She becomes agitated. She makes a soft "clucking-hooting" sound. She trots in circles around the center line. She is a Merriam's turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*), and her behavior seems erratic.

Despite my best efforts, it is a struggle to shoo her off the road. She clucks; I listen. A car goes by wondering about my mission. I chase her to the brush, but she circles around onto the road. "Dumb bird," I mutter. "Dumb human," she thinks. We have a failure to communicate.

Perhaps a bobcat chased her off her nest; or she could have an illness. No matter, my impatience has not resolved the danger in which she finds herself. I step back to think of a different strategy, and in that moment I realize that I need to see her through the lens of humility.

Wild turkeys are native to the Americas, and even though evidence suggests that they weren't part of the meal during that first Thanksgiving, their gobble or call continues to resonate over the holiday period. Turkeys, in fact, have 15 different vocal sounds, but also communicate (with each other) through touch, smell and perceived through visual cues.

#### IF YOU GO:

Go two hours after dawn or before dusk. It is hunting season. Wear hunter orange and be aware of other human activity in the area.

- A. Follow roads into the Uncompahgre National Forest. Dave Wood, Highway 90, Owl Creek Pass are roads that provide access to turkey habitat.
- B. Ridgway State Park: Hike the trails, but also be patient.
- C. Highway 347 and East Portal Road at Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park.

The males usually gobble in the spring when strutting to attract females. Their neck stretches back, chest puffs out, wings are lowered so the tips drag on the ground and the tail feathers arc in an impressive fanning display. This call can be heard up to a mile away.

Timing is everything when gobbling. A light breeze is helpful (3 to 6 mph), but the weather also needs to be cool. Optimal temperature is in the 60s. Springtime days that are too hot or too chilly will cause the males to cease their strutting.

And yet, gobbling goes on through the year in an unpredictable manner. Males will sound off to set up territory or dominance within a flock, perhaps when a predator appears, or when the flock is breaking up. Research also suggests we might not know why turkeys gobble throughout the year. The wisdom of the turkey is that we will never understand some aspects of our world.

By the time fall rolls around turkeys gather together for the winter. They tend to move



Wild turkey hens may lay up to 15 eggs in a shallow depression in the dirt. Nests are usually secluded in brush, vines and thickets with an incubation period of about a month. (Submitted photo/National Park Service)

around within their home range which, in Colorado can be more than 1,200 acres. Roosting in trees at night, foraging during the day; they are particularly looking for acorns at this time of year. They search from area to area.

Brad Banulis, with the local office of Colorado Parks and Wildlife, sees them moving out of aspen and Douglas fir stands to lower elevations. Locally their populations are steady to increasing, and he appreciates the health of local flocks.

"Their call makes them a charismatic part of our world," he told me.

A hunter once told me that he thrives when on the Uncompahgre Plateau in the

fall. He parks at the end of a dirt road and hikes miles to find a quiet campsite. Visiting with him at the International Sportmen's Expo in Denver, he said it was much more work to dress and pack the deer or elk so far back to the truck (turkey seasons are closed for now in Colorado).

He was so distant that he felt truly in tune with all of the creatures of the forest. Of special note was that he enjoyed hearing the wild turkey gobble. To him, the call added to the total experience. He was one with all of the animals. The extra work was humbling, and gave him a new appreciation for the strenuous connection to wilderness as his bearers knew it.

Patience came over me in my chase of the wild hen off of the highway. She eventually took to the pinyon pines and appeared safe from traffic. Realizing that there are some facets of turkeys, of all life, that we will never understand is to grasp humility in our world. Whatever might appear on your table this holiday season, perhaps seeing this wisdom of the turkey will add to the thanksgiving.

Paul Zaenger has been a supervisory park ranger at Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park since 1993. Other park assignments include Mount Rushmore National Memorial and Glen Canyon National Recreation Area.

## What happens when you contact 9-1-1

With the next couple of articles we will discuss how a 9-1-1 call works. We will also look into how the dispatch staff handles your call and how the response is co-coordinated with the emergency personnel.

In our scenario, we will track the call of a hunter who is lost on the Uncompahgre Plateau. The hunter has managed to find a place, high on a ridge, where he has cell service and has placed a call to 9-1-1.

The lost hunter's call connects to the cell tower and is transferred to a Mobile Switching Center. This center assigns routing information based on the cell tower, and sends the call to the 9-1-1 network. The 9-1-1 network sends the call to a dispatch center based on the tower routing information. Other information forwarded to dispatch may include the cell number making the call (call back number), a GPS location of the phone or a location of the tower that received the call.

All of this information is received by equipment in the backroom of the dispatch center. While this sounds like it may take a long time for all this to happen, it actually occurs instantaneously. A dispatcher then gets the voice call and all the information transferred by the mobile switching



### Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

center. At this point, our lost hunter is in voice communication with a dispatcher.

It should be pointed out that Montrose has two 9-1-1 dispatch centers, Westco and Montrose Regional Dispatch Center. For our purposes here, we will focus on Montrose Regional because that is whom the Sheriff's Posse usually works with in a scenario such as this.

I spoke with Matt Goetsch, who is the E9-1-1 System Administrator for the Montrose Emergency Telephone Service Authority or METSA. He stated, "A dispatcher can use a process called rebidding, where the backroom equipment updates the information on the caller. The dispatcher has to wait 20 to 30 seconds on the call before the rebid can take place, so the equipment can respond. The



This is a photo of the equipment in the "back room" of a dispatch center. All of this computer equipment helps assure that your call or text will make it to a 9-1-1 dispatcher. (Submitted photo/Mark Rackay)

process may result in updated X Y coordinates of the phone, known as the Phase 2 location.

It is important to note that the coordinates can be off by as much as 300 yards. For search and rescue purposes, this is not a major concern when looking for a lost person. It will put folks close enough that noise contact can usually be made.

If your phone shows no service, you should try the 9-1-1 calls anyway.

Thanks to the FCC, all

network providers must transfer a 9-1-1 emergency call regardless of whether you subscribe to their service or not. If your provider does not have service in the area, another may, and it is definitely worth trying to make the call.

If you can't make a call, try sending a text to 9-1-1. A text may go through when a call may not because it requires much less bandwidth to transmit. Both of the dispatch centers serving the Montrose area can receive 9-1-1 texts.

Both dispatch centers use

the same Text Control Center, which determines 9-1-1 text routing based on the X Y coordinates of the cell tower and GIS map of dispatch jurisdictions. The dispatch centers use an Internet-based system, which receives the texts via a secure web interface with the Text Control Center.

"A dispatcher can text back and forth but the session must be originated by the 9-1-1 caller. A 9-1-1-text session takes an average of 7 times longer to obtain the necessary information versus a voice call," stated Goetsch.

Goetsch further said, "The motto is call when you can, text when you can't."

A cell phone is a very important survival tool. According to the FCC, over 70 percent of all 9-1-1 calls are from cell phones. Keep your phone off when not in use to preserve battery life and carry a power bank with you for a recharge.

In the next column, we will discuss what steps are taken, and protocols followed by the dispatch center once you have made contact. Until next time, see you on the trail.

Mark Rackay is a freelance writer who serves as a Director 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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