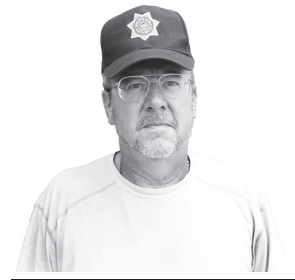


# Turkey season arrives



## Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

It is no secret anymore that I am an avid hunter. I used to try and hide my addiction but gave up on that. I hunt and I openly admit it. For me, the average hunting trip ends on the last day of the last season I have a tag for, one-half hour after sunset. This is usually the end of November. It begins all over again the following morning.

That leaves me about 12 hours a year to give the wife of many years a kiss, introduce myself to any new members of the family who might have arrived in the meantime (usually a new puppy), drop in at my office and look over the mail, and get caught up on some much needed sleep before it is time to start getting ready for the next hunting season arrives.

Well, there is good news in all of this because the next season is almost here. Colorado's Spring Turkey Season begins April 11 for most of us. Specific hunt dates vary by unit

and require purchasing a license through a draw or over the counter (OTC). The application deadlines have already passed but some OTC tags are available. Get a copy of the Turkey Hunting 2026 brochure or check with Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) for specific information.

Colorado is home to two subspecies of the turkey. One is the Rio Grande, or Meleagris gallopavo intermedia as it says on his mailbox. He was first dropped off here in our state back 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 and generally stays the heck away from the mountains, except for the foothills.

According to estimates from the Colorado Parks and Wildlife, CPW, the turkey is thriving here. The current population estimates exceed 35,000 birds, and they are present in 53 out of 64 counties across the State.

The native turkey to Colorado is called the Merriam's or Mountain Turkey, but he will answer to Meleagris gallopavo merriami. This bird lives primarily west of Interstate 25, preferring the mountainous regions. The Merriam's likes open

meadows and parks, oak brush and piñon junipers.

The noticeable difference between the two species might be the amount of white on the tips of the tail feathers. Merriam's have some white on the very tips while the Rio Grande usually has a golden or brown tip.

A turkey has no sense of smell, like many other wild animals do, so they rely on very good hearing and eyesight to survive. The best way to describe their eyesight is with the word "incredible." 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. Turkeys, when hunting, have busted me more

than all other game animals combined. The turkey has no night vision, which is why they stay on a roost during the nighttime hours.

When one sees you, and decides to make a hasty exit, they will leave you wondering how they got away so quickly. These birds are capable of flying up to 50 mph for short distances, and

can run at 25 mph, to escape a predator. When you spot a turkey in the wild, rest assure he has already seen you. It is amazing to me; just how



My buddy, Tanner Creel, finally convinced me to stop running around yelling "Here Turkey," and he was able to call this one in for me. He was just showing off. (Courtesy photo)

fast they can vanish from sight.

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.

My own calling ability

has been described as a motor vehicle crash, with no survivors, or fingernails dragging across a blackboard. Therefore, I must resort in taking someone more adept at calling, with me, when I go. I found out that running through the woods shouting, "Here turkey," doesn't work either.

Shotguns are the weapon of choice, as rifles are not legal in Colorado for Spring Turkey. You must use shot size of #2 or smaller, as any larger shot is illegal. Generally, #2, #4, #5, or #6 are the most popular. Lead, steel, bismuth, and tungsten shot are all used. Be sure to pattern your shotgun before heading to the woods.

Get that camo ready and practice your calling because the season is almost here. And while you are in the woods, and hear someone yelling "Here turkey," just pay no never mind. I am just trying to figure out this new turkey call.

Mark Rackay is a columnist for the Montrose Daily Press, Delta County Independent, and several other newspapers, as well as a feature writer for The Nautical Mile, and other saltwater fishing magazines. He is an avid hunter and world class saltwater angler, who travels around the world in search of adventure and serves as a Director and Public Information Officer for the Montrose County Sheriff's Posse. Personal email is elkhunter77@icloud.com For information about the Posse call 970-765-7033 (leave a message) or email info@mcspi.org

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## Boobies & vampires – learn about the Galapagos Islands in April 9 presentation

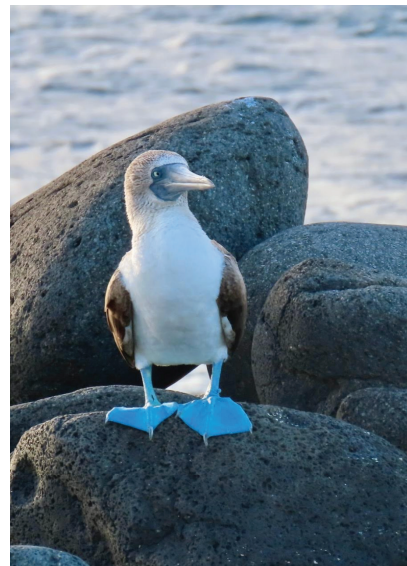
SPECIAL TO THE MDP

Boobies and vampires.

What could these two possibly have in common? More than you would think! First, both live in the same location — the Galapagos Islands. The Galapagos, a group of isolated islands about 600 miles west of mainland Ecuador is well known to be the home of many strange and unusual creatures like Blue-footed Boobies and a vampire-like species that flits around these islands with an unusual diet of drinking the blood from their feathered neighbors. Why do Blue-footed boobies have such colorful feet? What vampire like creature feeds on the blood of unsuspecting victims?

There is no place like the Galapagos. These islands have immense importance to the continued development of evolutionary science. Likewise, and sadly, their importance to ecological restoration is vital. The Black Canyon Audubon Society will host Nic Korte who will speak about this incredible place,

intertwining some of the research, the tragedies and the beauties of this remarkable archipelago. Korte is a retired



Blue-footed Bobbies on the Galapagos Islands. (Photo/Alan Reed)

geochemist and lifelong birder. His trip to the Galapagos sparked study of the unique research and challenges that characterize these islands. The presentation will be April 9, at 7 p.m. at the Montrose Field House Summit Room, 25 Colorado Ave. For more information about the speaker and topic go to programs at [www.blackcanyonaudubon.org](http://www.blackcanyonaudubon.org).

One of the most interesting animals is the

vampire finch (*Geospiza difficilis septentrionalis*). This unusual bird is a subspecies of the sharp-beaked ground finch

that lives on Darwin and Wolf Islands and has some striking behavioural differences from other sharp-beaked ground finches.

This bird earns its common name from its unusual diet. It occasionally drinks the blood of Nazca or blue-footed boobies. The sharp-beaked ground finch normally feeds on seeds and insects, but such things can often be in short supply on Darwin and Wolf. The vampire finch evolved this distinguished behaviour to supplement its diet.

The vampire finch uses its sharp beak to peck at the feathers and skin of the booby until blood is drawn and drinks the nutritious blood to enrich its diet when seeds and insects are scarce. Strangely the boobies don't seem to mind the vampire finches drinking their blood. It is believed that this behavior evolved from the vampire finches picking parasites from the feathers of the boobies.