

Putting the Sneak on a Turkey

By Al Cornell

When Alexys Stibbe shot her first gobbler, it wasn't a textbook hunt. I would be amazed if anyone reading this ever accomplished a similar turkey harvest.

In *Girl Hunter*, Georgia Pellegrini explains her transition from Wall Street and being a gourmet cook in Manhattan to an avid hunter who cooks up her own kills with some fancy recipes. On the other hand, Alexys, who will start her senior year at Richland Center High School this fall, has had the opportunity to shoot and hunt as she has grown up on a dairy farm where the REC lines stretch along Highway O near Ash Creek. She started by aiming a BB gun at starlings and pigeons. She went on to shoot squirrels with a .22 and has shot three deer with a rifle.

Her encouragement to hunt came from her dad, Kirk. Others have stepped in to help with turkey hunting. She was accompanied by a family friend, Jim Harris, on her successful hunt.

As I took a picture of her box call with "Learn to Hunt" engraved on it, she informed me that she won it at a calling contest when she was in sixth grade. It's great to see kids become involved in the time-honored outdoor activity of hunting. The increasing number of girls taking up hunting lends assurance that hunting is not dying anytime soon.

The reintroduction of wild turkeys to their na-

Alexys won this box call at a calling contest when she was in sixth grade.



Alexys and her first gobbler. (photo by Shelly Stibbe)

tive Wisconsin habitat, their rapid population growth, and their popularity among hunters and nature lovers comprise a remarkable wildlife success story. Gobbler hunting in April and May has added an amazing hunting experience for thousands of hunters. I'm impressed by the number of hunters who declare that turkey hunting is the most exciting hunt that they participate in.

Alexys described the excitement that stems from engaging a cranked-up gobbler in a conversation. That sets turkey hunting apart, as she tries to entice the big bird to come to her. Her first shot at a turkey, a couple years before her success, was difficult and exciting. Though the bird fell, it immediately jumped up and ran away. Many hunters can tell a similar story as they attempted to handle the excitement of that first shot at a turkey that they had called into shotgun range. In fact, that's sort of a repeat in the first chapter of *Girl Hunter*.

Alexys hunted with her dad on the first day of her season. They had one hen walk past. Then a deer came by





and craned its neck at the two hen and one jake decoys. It sniffed a few times and wandered past.

The next morning, she went with Jim. They set the decoys up in the dark and were positioned against tree trunks before the first gobbler boomed his wake-up call from his tree roost. A little later, hens were tree-yelping and the big birds were noisily flying down.

Listening to the waking up in the spring woods is a refreshing experience. Alexys says, “When all the birds start adding their songs to the early dawn chorus, I’m happy to be out there, and I have a sense of belonging there on those mornings.”

After having sat for four hours and not enticing any gobblers to their setup, Alexys and Jim decided to call it a morning. There had been a lot of gobbling early in the morning, and they had seen a few turkeys on a distant ridge. Nothing had come close. They had written it off as another great morning to be outdoors and witness another country sunrise.

Alexys says, “As we started walking out, suddenly I whispered, ‘Whoa, there’s a turkey.’ We were hidden behind some bushes and the gobbler was out in the field about 80 yards away. Jim said, ‘You have Indian blood in you, right?’ Being one-sixteenth Indian, I answered, ‘Yes.’ I knew Jim was referring to the stealth we associate with Native Americans and was encouraging me to try

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Above: Jim Harris went with Alexys on her special turkey hunt. (photo by Shelly Stibbe)

Left: Turkeys are alert to anything unusual that they encounter.

Sneak on a Turkey

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sneaking within range of this gobbler. So, with nothing to lose, I carefully began an approach while staying behind the brush along the field edge.

“When I’d made it about half way to the bird, Jim had a better view of what the gobbler was doing. I looked back at him, and he indicated that it had gone to sleep. As I slipped out into the field, I could tell that the bird’s head was down in the grass, and it was taking a nap.

“I started moving into the field with the gobbler in plain view. I was watching for it to raise its head. At 25

yards, I sat down, steadied the gun on it and waited. After a couple minutes, it began to lift its head. When I could see blue of its head straight beyond the bead on the 12 gauge, I squeezed the trigger. He dropped and I knew I hadn’t missed this time.

“I was so excited! It was my fourth year of enjoying the hunt, but now I had gotten my first turkey!”

Following the thrill of a successful spring turkey hunt, turkey dinner takes on a new level of delectable dining. But the savoring of the hunt lasts even longer as is evidenced by Alexys’ story. Most of us who have pursued the challenging and wary wild turkey can only shake our heads at the unlikeliness of putting the sneak on a turkey in plain view.

I asked Alexys if she had any plans to increase the challenge of future hunts. As it relates to turkeys, she thought she would start hunting by herself sometimes. For whitetails, she wants to add bow hunting.

However, the big plan for the future includes her dad and likely a sibling or two. They are applying for a bear permit, and thusly gaining preference points so they can get a harvest permit within a few years. Then they plan to go north for that exciting hunting adventure.

Yet, regardless of whatever comes next, it will be hard to top the thrill of the unlikely turkey hunt. ■

Alexys is thinking ahead to her next turkey hunting adventure.



Energy Efficiency Tip of the Month



Circulate savings! Ceiling fans are a great way to keep cool during the warmer months ahead and can even allow you to raise your thermostat setting about 4 degrees without affecting your comfort.

Source: energy.gov

Richland Electric Cooperative
will be closed
Monday, May 25,
for Memorial Day.



REMEMBER



Captain Midnight and Jack Armstrong

At first all I heard was a little static when I snapped on our Philco Battery-operated radio. (We did not have electricity in 1945). Every afternoon, after my chores were done—the wood boxes filled, the chickens fed, and the eggs gathered—I could listen to my stories. I was there, with my heroes, living high adventure through the radio.

I heard the announcer's voice and pulled my chair a little closer. I was listening to *Captain Midnight*, one of my favorite programs where the bad guys are captured, the good guys are saved, and everything came out all right by the end of each segment. The program was sponsored by Ovaltine, a powdered chocolate-lie-flavoring to mix with milk. I convinced Ma that I absolutely needed to drink Ovaltine, a least three jars of it. If I sent in three jar labels, I would receive a genuine decoder ring. Everyone at school seemed to have the ring, and I didn't. I never told Ma that I didn't like Ovaltine-flavored milk. I drank a glassful every meal, trying to smile as I did. I had to have the decoder ring. It was impossible to grasp the entire meaning of each *Captain Midnight* show without

decoding the message at the end. And besides, the kids at school discussed the secret messages at recess, and wouldn't share the information with me.

Finally, the second jar of Ovaltine was empty, and I urged Ma to buy the third and final one so that I could send in the labels. I filled out the little form and mailed it all in. And I waited. Program after program went by, and I missed the important message at the end because I didn't have a decoder ring.

After a month a little box arrived in the mail. I tore the box open and there was my ring. It was a shiny gold and blue ring that could be adjusted to fit my finger. I slipped it on, hardly able to wait until evening and the *Captain Midnight* show.

When the show was over, the announcer read the secret numbers and I copied them on a sheet of paper. After some struggle and adjustment of my special decoder ring, I figured out the message. "D-r-i-n-k m-o-r-e O-v-a-l-t-i-n-e." Some message. I didn't even like the stuff.

Ma asked me if she should buy more Ovaltine. I said, "No, please buy Wheaties."

She asked why. I said I was switching from *Captain Midnight* to *Jack Armstrong*. I said that "Wheaties, the breakfast of champions" sponsored *Jack Armstrong*.

I put my fancy decoder ring aside, disappointed that the message was simply another commercial. As I learned later, about every fourth or fifth message was the "Buy more Ovaltine" message. The rest of the messages were legitimate. But I was adamant in my decision. "You may fool me once, but not twice." ■

For more information about Jerry's books and his TV work go to www.jerryapps.com. His newest book, *is Whispers and Shadows: A Naturalist's Memoir*.



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