

# STARTING OFF THE 2010 HUNTING SEASON RIGHT!

- Reg Wiebe, MWF Hunter Education Coordinator

Some may recall last year's Wild Turkey hunting episode where, on the last day of the spring season, my grandson Riley had a chance at a Wild Turkey and ended up shooting over top of the bird. That season ended with no Wild Turkey for the young hunter, but a lot of determination to not let that happen again!

A little background might be in order here. Riley lives on a small acreage near Portage La Prairie in an area that has a few Wild Turkeys on adjacent properties. He resides there with his parents and one younger brother, Evan. It is actually Evan that originally got the Wild Turkey bug at age 8. He has accompanied me on a few Wild Turkey hunts and is quite keen on keeping close watch on their whereabouts. Evan isn't a big fan of firearms as the loud report is too much for his very sensitive ears. Even with double ear protection, shotguns and full bore rifles are not to his liking. He prefers to accompany me when I am hunting with a bow. Last season I managed to get my Wild Turkey with a bow and of course, Riley decided that if it was "that easy" then, surely he could get one with a shotgun! Well, the "easy" part didn't happen as we all know. This mistake was not to happen again.

Riley kept watch on a small flock of Wild Turkeys all winter. There was one big Tom with at least a 9 inch beard in there that he claimed as his. Of course, as soon as the weather got warm these birds were out in the pasture scratching for whatever lay beneath the melting ground. The birds dispersed early this spring making the selection a bit more challenging than anticipated by the young hunter. The long-bearded Tom had disappeared entirely and that is likely why he is that big!

Much to the liking of our young hunter, Manitoba Conservation announced that there would be a special youth spring Wild Turkey season that would open one week earlier than the regular spring opening date. This was a great opportunity for youngsters in this province to take advantage of as spring had come early and Wild Turkey activity was at its peak. Of course, Riley made the comment that "you can't shoot any turkeys during the youth week, so I get to take one first!" My reply was that if he didn't get a turkey that week, he was on his own!

Day one arrived on April 17. We had watched a small flock with 7 hens and 2 Toms the evening before and noted where they were roosting. We planned to set up our decoys and blind early the next day in the dark where we would intercept the flock of Wild Turkeys on their way from the roost to their feeding area. Great plan, except our rooky hunter didn't hear his

alarm! We headed out anyway but had to take a detour through a heavily wooded area so as not to disturb the flock which had come down from their roost and were headed past the exact spot we were to set up our blind. We managed to set up alongside the pasture but the birds were too far off and heading away from our ambush. There was no cover to move ahead of the flock for another ambush so we stayed put and watched. It was a beautiful morning none-the-less, an even better morning for the 2 nice Toms that were safely out of reach gobbling at the top of their lungs and strutting their stuff. My young "mentee" was getting a good taste of grandpa's irritating rant about getting up on time, not working to our plan, etc. all the while knowing full well we were both outdoors on a most gorgeous morning seeing not only Wild Turkeys wandering off oblivious to our presence, a Jack Rabbit with half his winter coat revealing his whereabouts bounding off at full speed, coyotes getting in their last howl until evening and noisy geese gathering behind us possibly looking for a morning feed. The day was awakening with the sounds and smells of spring and we were in the midst of it all. This was hunting at its finest!

I had made plans to attend the National Wild Turkey Federation banquet that evening so no hunt was planned for the evening. My young hunting partner was however, quite apologetic about his mistake in the morning and offered to be up bright and early the next morning. It was grandpa's turn to bail out of a morning hunt. I explained that there was a good possibility that I might not be up to getting up too early as it was going to be a late night. It seems that once one reaches the age of 35ish (ha!), it's not so easy to party late and get up early. We agreed to try a Sunday evening hunt.

Day 2, April 18 didn't see an early morning as was predicted. We headed out to the pasture around supper time and set up our decoys and blind. The 2 Toms and 7 hens from the day before were out in the middle of the pasture near an old dugout. They would wander our way and then turn and head the opposite direction. At times they seemed to be heading towards the woods only to turn around and come back to the old dugout. We watched for nearly 2 hours and even though we were calling at times, the Toms would just gobble loudly and stay with their hens. Every once in a while, they would look over to where our decoys were set, but they didn't seem to have much interest. We had 1 Jake and 3 hens as decoys. One of the hens decided to separate from the flock and walked past our blind on the open side. We thought we



*Congratulations  
Riley from  
Grandpa*

were busted, but the hen had her eye on a favourite patch of feed that she must have visited earlier. She pecked about for a while and then turned back oblivious to our presence and re-joined the flock. By now, the flock had wandered closer to our location. They were following an old cow path, where at one point, both Toms dusted their feathers when they reached a bare spot of dirt on the path.

Just as we both had pretty much resigned ourselves to the fact that this was going to be an uneventful evening, both Toms decided to take notice of our decoys. They were about 150 yards away and suddenly started closing the gap rather quickly! Riley barely had time to get his shotgun up and ready and there they were! Our decoys were about 20 yards from our blind. Both Toms were heading right for the Jake. They stopped short of the Jake and started strutting. They were both so close together that it was impossible to shoot without hitting both until they separated. The larger of the 2 Toms decided to move in closer and the young hunter shot on cue. Both birds lifted off and flew a short distance. I heard the pump action cycle and knew Riley was somewhat frustrated but at the same time ready for another shot. Both Toms approached again and at 30 yards, I whispered "take him!" BOOM! With that the large Tom staggered, turned, and attempted to flee once more, but to no avail. The other Tom decided to stick around and even walked up to his former partner to see why he wasn't moving. He would not leave until we exited the blind and began our approach.

What a beautiful bird with such a deep shiny black and glistening splashes of iridescent plumage! His beard was just a bit better than 8 1/2 inches with a second tiny beard appearing upon closer inspection. The overall size of the bird was impressive. We "guesstimated" him at about 18 pounds.

What a great hunt and what a great ending! The opportunity to mentor a young hunter in a special season set aside just for youth is most rewarding. Thanks to Manitoba Conservation for making this happen. I hope others are able to take advantage of this provision so they too can experience what a thrill it is to see another hunter enjoy our way of life. Remember: Those who say it can't be done, should not interrupt those of us who are doing it!