

Henry Zeman, National Wild Turkey Federation

Kids enjoy calling turkeys long before they are old enough to hunt.



FOR KIDS ONLY!

DEC Plans April 2008 Youth Turkey Hunt

A

by Michael Schiavone

thundering gobble from the turkey perched high atop a

white pine tree shatters the predawn silence. Other gobblers take the cue from this boss tom and begin calling from their roosts on distant ridge tops. A few soft yelps from my turkey call generate more replies—gobble after gobble—and the bass notes reverberate in my chest. The excited drumming of my heart almost drowns out the turkeys!

Young hunters afield for the first time seldom have the opportunity to have their senses flooded by their quarry before the sun even crests the horizon. But spring turkey hunting affords them this opportunity. Hearing and seeing the spring woods come to life in an explosion of sound and anticipation is, for many, a hallowed experience.

DEC established a special youth hunt for wild turkeys in spring 2004, and since then more than 5,000 junior hunters have participated each year. The fifth annual youth turkey hunt will be held on April 26-27, 2008. This is a great chance for young hunters, 12-15 years old, to learn safe, responsible turkey hunting tactics including how to call in and harvest a wary gobbler. With the help of their adult mentors, junior hunters participating in the youth hunt have had a similar success rate to hunters participating in the regular spring season (May 1-31). This is a testament to the skills and knowledge passed from one generation of hunters to the next.

The special season for youth hunters allows them to be outdoors in less crowded conditions and to acclimate to hunting at their own pace. It is difficult to say who finds the event more rewarding—the young hunters or their mentors.

Thomas Flaitz, an environmental conservation officer who has been organizing youth hunts for waterfowl and turkeys in Genesee and Orleans counties since 2001, says, “The kids are having fun; the fathers are having fun. It’s important to get young hunters on board. If a kid shoots his first bird, he is hooked for the rest of his life. Their smile says it all.”

One of the primary goals of the youth hunts is to help sustain hunting participation and its associated recreational and wildlife conservation benefits. While the conservation benefits cannot be overstated, perhaps the greatest benefit of the youth hunt is passing down the tradition, knowledge, and experiences from one generation to the next, and spending quality time with friends and family outdoors.

Michael Schiavone is a wildlife biologist in DEC’s Albany office.



Courtesy of Giancola Family

Brianna Giancola with her first turkey.

The first step toward a lifelong hunting experience is taking a hunter education course. You can find course locations and dates on the DEC website (www.dec.ny.gov) or by calling 1-888-HUNT-ED2. If you are fortunate enough to have an adult family member or friend who hunts, they can accompany you in the field during youth hunts. If you do not, there are several organizations such as county sportsmen federations, local chapters of the National Wild Turkey Federation, and others that host youth hunts. Contact your local representatives to see if any youth hunts are organized in your area. Always be aware of season dates, bag limits, and other regulations before you go. Visit the DEC website and review the New York Hunting and Trapping Guide for details.

Have a hunting story or some pictures you would like to share? We would love to hear from you! Please e-mail us at fwwildlf@gw.dec.state.ny.us. Be safe and good luck this season!