

Back Trails

Perspectives on People and Nature

John Bulmer

Listen to the Sunrise by Thomas Adessa

As I sit in the silent, pre-dawn darkness waiting for the first gobble, my thoughts wander. The vapor of my breath and patches of frost on the ground bring back memories of my youth and of pheasant hunts with my father.

Morning in the spring woods during turkey season is a special time afield. It is a time of renewal; the forests and fields are coming alive again after a long, sleepy winter. Deer still have the tattered remnants of their winter coats, and a shaded hollow can hold so many trilliums that the ground appears to have a leftover patch of snow.

On some treks into the woods I carry a shovel as well as a shotgun. On the way home I dig leeks that are bound for a thick soup. Always mindful of an old friend, I dig some for him, too. A bum hip makes his days of turkey hunting a thing of the past. His blue eyes and weathered face light up when I hand him a freshly dug batch. "Spring tonic," he says, as he crunches one. Between sips of coffee he tells stories about turkey hunting.

Impatient for the dawn, I check my watch for the third time. I am still sleepy after a restless night of anticipation. Two cups of coffee have not fully awakened me. "Just close your eyes until the first gobble," I think. Leaning my head back against a large silver maple, I listen to the silence.

There is no cell phone to chirp messages, or traffic noise to spoil the morning. Then I hear it: "Fffttt, Fffttt, Fffttt." It's the sound of a sparrow flitting from branch to branch. Looking up into the twisted branches of a nearby beech tree, I think, "How many turkeys have roosted here over the years?"



Edward Jakubowski

Off to the east the new day is but a pink blush on the horizon.

Suddenly a male cardinal voices his distinct song and the woods come to life. I hear a woodpecker hammering out his first meal of the day. Or maybe he is courting a mate? Even the cattle in a nearby pasture can't resist joining, and that prompts a boss gobbler to sound off.

No matter how many times I hear it, the morning's first gobble is always exciting; it makes the pulse pound in my ears. I scratch out some soft tree yelps and another booming gobble splits the cool air. Long minutes go by and just before the start of legal shooting time, comes the "Whoof, Whoof, Whoof" of turkeys flying down from their overnight roosts. I hear the cackles of an anxious hen, and the tom's response. During the next hour, I try as I might to entice that tom, but instead he leads his entourage of ladies away, over the ridgeline.

As the sun breaks over the horizon, songbirds sing to the new day and to their mates. The crisp morning air carries the sound of a farmer chugging his tractor to life as he prepares to start his long day.

There is no turkey slung over my shoulder as I hike back to my truck. But I smile as I listen to the distinct cry of a pileated woodpecker and watch its undulating flight. Its call prompts the gobbler to sound off one more time. It is just the tom's way of letting me know he is still there. And although I return without a turkey, I go home with a different kind of bounty; one I receive every time I make a trip into the early-morning woods.

It's a gift that carries more weight than the heaviest tom. I took the time to listen to the sunrise.

Thomas Adessa is a Central New York native and an avid lover of the outdoors.