

Perseverance is key for Mossy Oak Turkey Pro

by Lee Keck

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PROVIDENCE, Ky - Mention western Kentucky to most outdoor folks and their thoughts automatically turn to the terrific fishing found in the famous Barkley and Kentucky lakes.

Bring up this same topic to Mossy Oak hunting expert Darrin Campbell of West Virginia and his thoughts begin to focus on the world-class turkey hunting found in this area.

And, this is not without reason. Unlike Illinois where turkey numbers have struggled in recent years, Kentucky's turkey population is thriving.

"We have a high percentage of adult birds in our flocks and they are coming into breeding season in excellent condition because of last fall's big mast (nut) crop," said Steven Dobey, wild turkey biologist for the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources. "The big harvest of two-year-old birds last season may have buffered (lessened) the number of three-to-four year-olds taken."

Kentucky's 23-day spring wild turkey season is currently underway and continues through May 6. According to biologists, hunters should anticipate the prospect of another excellent spring season.

"I think we'll see some carryover from that reproductive boom a few years ago," Dobey said. "It was such a massive hatch."

It was this exciting turkey outlook that last week lured Campbell and the 20-or-so other hunting celebrities and outdoor media accompanying him here to western Kentucky's lovely Winghaven Hunting Lodge. Not only was the Kentucky turkey population thriving, the lodge was situated in Crittenden County - one of the state's finest turkey hunting locations.

"I'm sure we'll see good hunting tomorrow," Campbell said on the preceeding [Edit](#)

evening. "We traveled some of the back roads today and spotted birds all over the place. This is going to be some world-class hunting."

Of course, the sun was shining at that time and temperatures were hovering near the 80-degree mark. No one really anticipated the torrential rains and pounding hail that were to arrive later that night.

The storms that came were unlike those many of the hunters had ever witnessed before. Along with the occasional bouts of heavy hail, rain poured from the sky most of the night. In fact, the water came so quickly that it flooded a large portion of the beautiful Winghaven Lodge.

The hunters began to rise the next morning just as lodge personnel were wiping the final remnants of water interior of the building. The previous night's powerful storms had now passed out of the area and most of the hunters were wondering what challenges the unusual overnight weather would present.

In it's wake, the storm left strong northerly winds, cloudy skies and temperatures nearly 40-degrees lower than the previous day.

In most turkey hunting situations, the hunters would have merely climbed back into bed and await better weather. Here, however, everyone still looked forward to their time in the woods.

Campbell and his hunting partner Outdoor Guide Magazine editor Bob Whitehead of St. Louis were assigned a somewhat isolated location some 15 miles from the lodge. Others were heading to hunting spots located within a few miles of the lodge.

Though far from the ideal hunting conditions, each anticipated an exciting day in the turkey woods. Campbell said perseverance, even during less than ideal hunting weather, is often the key to success.

"Unlike hunters, wild turkeys do not have the luxury of crawling back into bed and waiting for nicer weather," he explained. "No matter what kind of weather we have, each day in the wild turkey's life focuses around the effort for survival."

Despite the conditions, success came rather quickly for Campbell and Whitehead. Locating a gobbling bird before daylight, Campbell concentrated on calling it into shooting range. By 6:30 a.m., his daily turkey tag was already filled.

Success for Whitehead was only slightly slower in coming. His first opportunity to fill a tag came when two young male turkeys (known as Jakes) stepped into shooting range. Whitehead, however, opted to continue hunting in search of an adult gobbler.

That opportunity came about 10:30 a.m. when a 24-pound longbeard walked into shooting range.

Campbell and Whitehead's success proved to be a true lesson in turkey hunting. Rain or shine, hunters who really want to harvest a bird should spend every available hour in the turkey woods.

"The best tip I can provide hunters is to spend as much time in the woods as possible" Campbell said. "It's a fact that you can't harvest a bird if you're not in the woods."

He said that turkeys are in the woods every day and that is where the hunters need to be if they intend to fill their tag.

Anyone seeking more information about the excellent turkey hunting opportunities found in western Kentucky should contact Russell Edwards at Winghaven Lodge at (270)836-7988. Additional information is also available on the website <http://www.winghavenlodge.com>.