

For those Virginians who are spring gobbler fanatics—and we are legion—gearing up for spring is an annual rite. Here’s what you need to know concerning camo, calls, cushions, and calling in that old monarch.

Camo

Virginia’s own Jim Crumley is a legend in the camouflage business and is nationally known for his turkey hunting prowess. The conventional wisdom is that hunters should start the spring with a dark pattern then go progressively “greener” as the season and foliage progresses. Interestingly, the Botetourt County resident disagrees.

“I still believe that an all-bark pattern is excellent for spring gobbler hunting in Virginia,” says Crumley. “For example, the Original Trebark, the Mossy Oak Bottomland, and the first Realtree pattern were all bark based and work just as well today as they did when they came out.”

“The bottom line is that when Trebark started the concept of modern-day camo, it was successful because it helped a hunter blend in better with the bark of a tree. Usually, when a spring gobbler hunter pulls the trigger, his rear is on the ground and his back against a tree. So why would he need anything other than a bark pattern? It’s perfect. The color of a tree’s bark only changes when a heavy rain comes and then it darkens.

“Don’t worry about the leaves and twigs and green and brown stuff. One bark camo pattern will carry a Virginia hunter through the season.”

Trebark has a new camouflage pattern coming out in July that is an all-bark pattern that has been computer generated. The pattern will be dubbed Trebark 00-5 to commemorate the 25th anniversary of Crumley’s revolutionizing the camo business with his first pattern. The Original Trebark pattern will also be reissued. For more information, contact 800-THE-CAMO, www.outfittertuff.com.



Sherly Crumley (Jim's wife) examines a turkey feather during a hunt in Botetourt County.

Gearing Up for Virginia’s Spring Gobbler Season Camo, Calls, Cushions, and More

Story and photos by
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Calls

Lynchburg’s David White operates Fantomb Turkey Calls, which specializes in custom crafted box and slate calls. Two of his most popular creations are the box calls he constructs from purple heart and zebra wood. With the process of wood burning and custom painting, each call features its own individual sound. Not surprisingly, White is a big fan of this sound maker.

“Whether you are a novice or an expert hunter this spring, you really can’t go wrong with a box call,” says White. “Boxes really excel at making realistic hen yelps and clucks. Of course, slate and glass calls are super for purring and cutting,

and the big advantage of diaphragms is that because they eliminate hand movement, they are great for when a gobbler is close by. But, still, if I were restricted to just one call this spring, it would be a box.”

For more information, contact White at Fantomb Turkey Calls, 2849 Hawkins Mill Road, Lynchburg, VA 24503 (434-385-8077 or 877-FANTOMB); www.fantomb.com.

Cushions

When I initially began to spring gobbler hunt in 1986, I was a run-and-gun hunter, the type who gallops off across the forest toward a bellowing tom. As the



Each of the different categories of turkey calls has its own plusses and functions.

years began to go by and after killing a few birds but bumping many more, I gradually began to rethink my aggressive approach. Today, on occasion and when the situation warrants, I will still occasionally charge a hard-gobbling bird.

But the vast majority of the time, I believe that Old Dominion hunters will have a better chance for success if they amble within, say, 125 yards of a tom (that is, if the terrain permits a hunter moving that close) and then sit still from anywhere from five minutes to two hours. This is not a glamorous tactic, to be sure, but it does have the advantage of being highly effective.

Since a major aspect of my game plan is confirmed sitting, I have strong opinions about seat cushions. I don't care

for the kind that can be dropped down from a vest as they possess too little padding to protect against the cold ground of early April or the rocks and sticks that seem to exist everywhere there is a tree wide enough to place our backs against.

My favorite cushion is the D-Wedge Compact Folding Backside from Therm-a-Seat/Northeast Products, www.therm-a-seat.com (978-683-5434). The D-Wedge features a thick bottom seat, an adjoining back cushion and a loopy strap. The thick bottom raises a posterior off the icy ground, and the top part keeps one's back off cold tree bark, thus allowing an individual to sit longer without fidgeting. And as spring gobbler hunters know, if we fidget or stretch at the wrong

time, the next sounds we may hear are a gobbler putting and wings flapping.

Calling in a Longbeard

Besides being a former run-and-gunner, I am also a reformed loud caller. My day of epiphany came in 1999 when a veteran hunter and I were working a longbeard. The tom had been difficult to work all morning, frequently hanging up and refusing to leave a Rockbridge County flat. But eventually the old boy determined that the "hens" some distance away were not going to change their position and decided to come in to investigate.

When the bird was about 50 yards away through the trees, I mounted my Remington 1100 and began to train its sights on his head. But suddenly my buddy began to yelp forcefully and the bird stopped and peered our way. Seeing no hen as the source for those loud sounds and possibly alarmed that any hen would call that raucously, the gobbler putted and flew away.

Now I almost always yelp and cluck very softly and cut only as a desperation tactic (such as when legal hunting time is almost over or a tom has wandered away with hens). On the whole, then, my basic philosophy is to sit a lot and call little.

For the Old Dominion turkey enthusiast, the spring period is the most wonderful time of the year. There is an invigorating smell that comes with the greening countryside, and the pastoral views of a reawakening earth spark our sporting souls. It is a grand time to be alive and out in the Virginia countryside.

The author with a Botetourt County longbeard that he called in.



Bruce Ingram is the author of the following books: *The James River Guide* (\$15.00), *The New River Guide* (\$15.00), and *The Shenandoah/Rappahannock Rivers Guide* (\$18.25). To obtain a copy, send a check to Ingram at P.O. Box 429, Fincastle, VA 24090 or contact Ecopress (800-326-9272).