

# Keeping an Eye on the gobbler

## Missouri wild turkey expert to speak Thursday in Macomb

Ray Eye was born among wild turkeys in the Missouri Ozarks. At the age of nine, he killed his first gobbler. So it's no surprise he depends entirely on this big bronze bird to "scratch out a living."

Without question, the 35-year-old Missourian has emerged as one of the top two or three authorities in the nation on the wild turkey.

On Thursday, starting at 7:30 p.m., he will appear in Macomb at the American Legion Building, 221 E. Washington, to give a slide presentation and turkey hunting seminar.

For the admission fee of \$3, an attendee will have opportunity to absorb the 26 years of hunting and calling experience he'll share that evening. Ray is an entertaining speaker, mixing Ozark wit and humor with his presentation.

Eye knows turkeys and their language. He has won numerous calling competitions, including two national championships and a Levi Garrett All-American title. He began making his own calls for contests, eventually winding up in the call business full-time 11 years ago. He manufactured about 180,000 turkey calls annually.

He later sold his business and currently works in product development for H.S. Strut, a branch of Hunter's Specialties of Cedar



Ray Eye



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Outdoors

Rapids, Iowa. He also runs a turkey hunting camp, complete with guides, on private ground in northeast Missouri.

Because of his expertise and national recognition, Eye has appeared on many radio and television shows. He also has been featured in a number of turkey hunting articles in major magazines.

You might recall a feature on Eye in the May 18, 1987 edition of Outdoor Highlights, published by the Illinois Department of Conservation.

"When I was young, I used to go out in the woods and call, and if I didn't hear something right away, I'd say to myself, 'Well, they aren't talking today,' and I'd leave," he told writer Gary Thomas.

"One day when I was walking out of the woods, I heard a hen call and a turkey gobble, and I wondered why that gobbler answered that hen but wouldn't answer me. The reason was that hen sounded like a turkey. That's when I got real serious about calling.

"I started imitating the birds — duplicating their rhythm, their tone, how they called.

I started sounding like a turkey, and then I started getting birds regularly."

Ray feels rhythm and tone are the most important aspects of calling in a gobbler. For the uninformed, spring turkey seasons are designed to correspond with the breeding season. Object is to imitate the yelp and bring in a love-stricken tom.

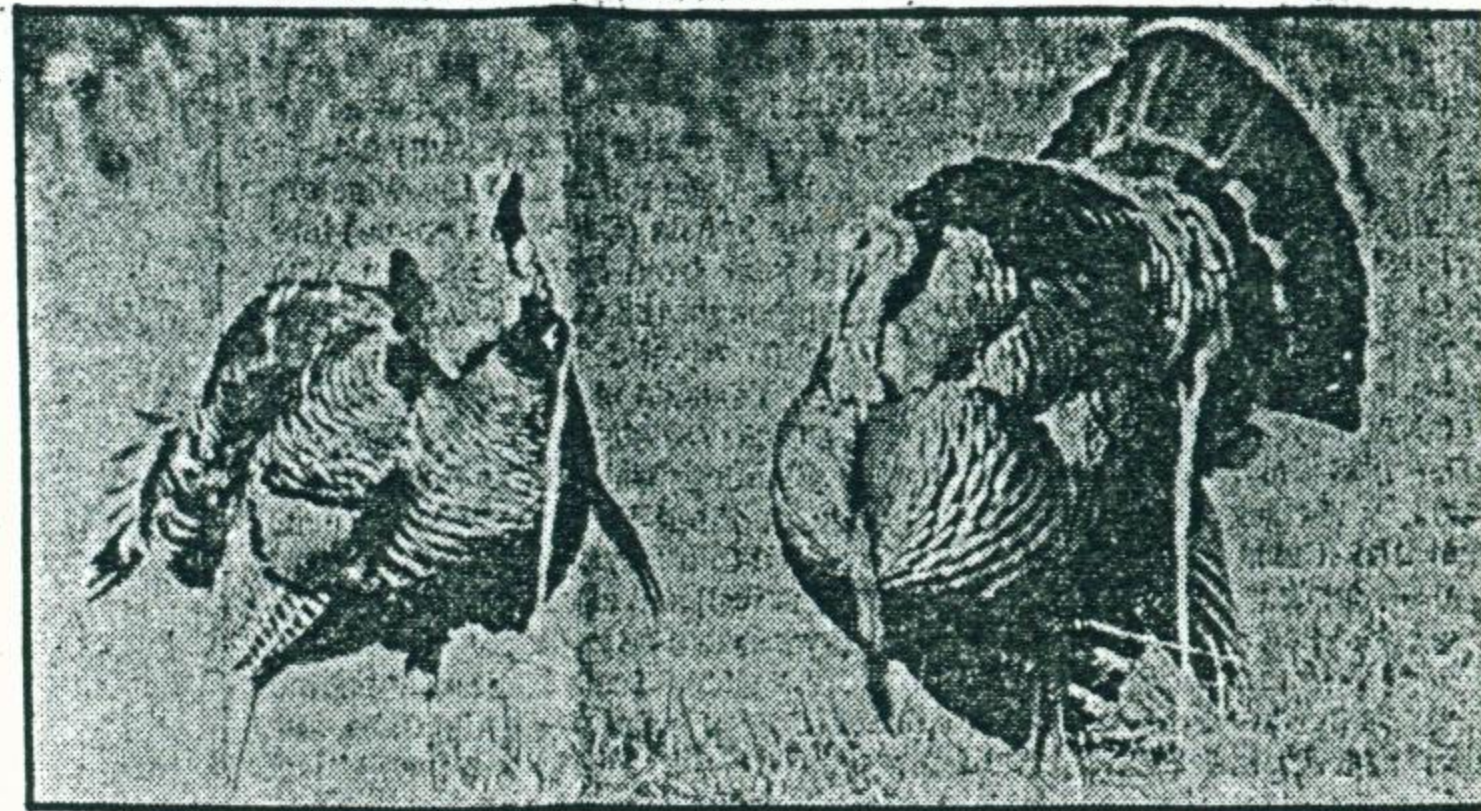
"If you have the right rhythm and tone you can make a lot of mistakes in your calling and not spook a turkey," Eye said. "You can call squeaky or squawk or be raspy or clear, and if you have the right rhythm you should attract a gobbler."

He feels turkeys, in a sense, are similar to people. They possess different personalities and ways of expressing themselves. Not all of them sound the same. Through the years he has learned the sounds they make in different situations.

But he feels the main reason a hunter leaves the woods without a gobbler is because of the lack of patience and not being able to sit motionless.

"The biggest reason for failure is hunters spooking the bird," he said. "You can get away with a lot of mistakes and still get a turkey, but moving is not one of them. That will spook a bird quicker than anything."

He believes poor calling is the second biggest error most hunters make. "Too many hunters pick up their turkey calls a couple of weeks before the season begins, practice two or three times for 20 minutes and think they're ready to go hunting," he said. "It takes a lot more than that. You have to have rhythm



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and you should sound like a turkey. That takes a lot of practice — more than what a lot of hunters are willing to give."

Eye came out with his first turkey hunting videotape several weeks ago. Called "Eye on the Wild Turkey," the 60-minute VHS tape not only provides tips on interpreting sign, calling techniques and hunting under various conditions but also offers spectacular footage of birds strutting, gobbling and coming to a call.

The production can be described in a word: excellent.

If you enjoy hunting gobblers, it'll put your heart in your throat. After watching it, you'll want to paint your face and sit in the woods with a shotgun on your knee. Maybe even scratch for acorns.

The tape sells for \$49.95, plus \$3.75 per copy for shipping and handling. A copy is available by sending a check or money order to "Eye on the Wild Turkey," P.O. Box 236, Hillsboro, MO 63050.

Farm King Supply, headquartered in Macomb, is bringing in Eye. Rick Severs of Farm King says a variety of turkey hunting equipment, from clothing and calls to turkey pattern targets and decoys, will be on display for the convenience of attendees. Items can be purchased.

Jared "Jerry" Garver, turkey biologist for the Illinois Department of Conservation, said turkeys have already started gobbling in the Shawnee Hills Country of Illinois where he resides.

The Illinois season will run in three segments from April 11-May 4. In Eye's home state of Missouri, where they expect more than 40,000 bearded birds, to be bagged, hunting will run April 18-May 1.

Cheryl Thompson in the Illinois D.O.C. Permit Office said the response for a second permit has been well received. About 500 permits remained as of Thursday.