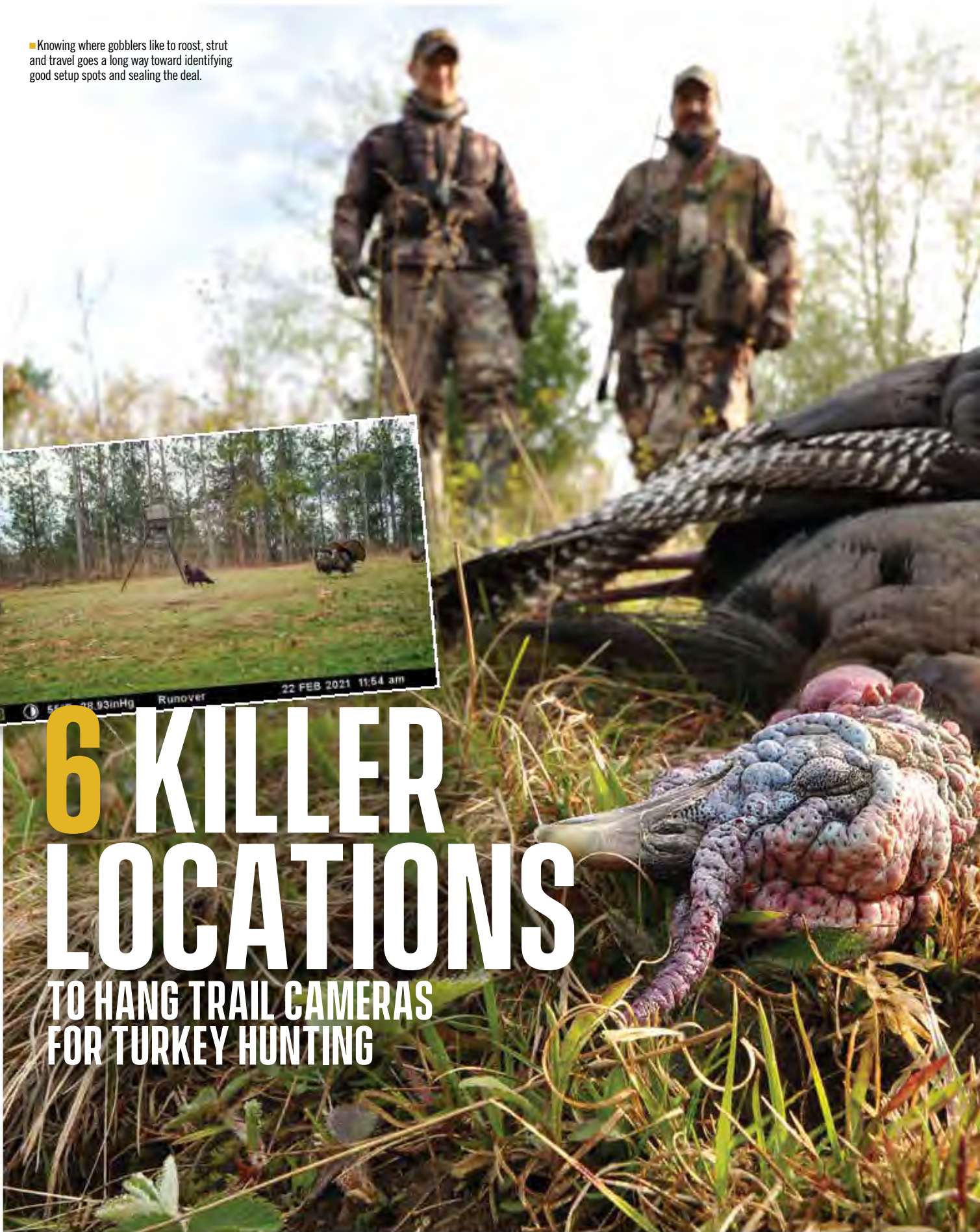


■ Knowing where gobblers like to roost, strut and travel goes a long way toward identifying good setup spots and sealing the deal.



6 KILLER LOCATIONS

TO HANG TRAIL CAMERAS FOR TURKEY HUNTING



Most deer hunters use trail cameras, but have you tried them for turkey hunting? If not, you might be missing the action and some insightful information.

■ by *Darron McDougal*

I've taken dozens of gobblers with a bow and dozens with a shotgun the past 20 years. I've also been humbled many times. Along the way, I've learned you cannot know too much about turkeys on your hunting property, particularly if you're a stationary hunter. I've sat in blinds and scratched my head countless times after watching birds avert me after I deployed what I believed was a killer setup.

Not to diminish the effectiveness of calls and decoys — I rarely hunt without them — but nothing replaces being positioned where turkeys want to be. The only way to put yourself in that position is to learn as much as possible about how turkeys use the property you hunt. Where do they roost? Where do they fly down? Where do gobblers strut? What food sources are they frequenting? Are gobblers with hens or alone? For that matter, are there any gobblers on the property? So many questions loom, and if you could do nothing but scout and hunt for turkeys, you could answer them and be in the middle of the action opening morning. Unfortunately, it doesn't always work that way.

Obviously, few turkey hunters have the luxury of spending hours scouting, watching and hunting turkeys. While we're working, eating dinner with our families or sitting in church on Sunday, turkeys are being turkeys. Tons of activity transpires when we aren't watching. That's why placing a trail camera — or several — in the woods makes good sense. If you place cameras at good locations, you'll likely capture enough information to identify some turkey habits that will help you pick the perfect ambush location.

GETTING STARTED

Hanging trail cameras for deer is easy. Deer create trails and follow them. They make scrapes and rubs. Their droppings are easy to see. And signs of their feeding are typically obvious.

Turkeys, on the other hand, are slightly different. Indications of their daily activities are sometimes obvious, but I've hunted a lot of good properties where sign wasn't easily distinguishable. Whether sign is obvious or nonexistent, here are six proven locations at which you should consider hanging trail cameras to capture turkey intel.

EVEN IF YOU HAVEN'T SEEN TURKEYS IN FIELDS, IT DOESN'T MEAN THEY AREN'T USING THOSE AREAS.



PHOTO BY DARRON MCDUGAL

■ Field entry and exit routes can be great spots to place trail cameras and hunt. Turkeys often access fields at common areas, such as where a logging road meets the field.

FOOD PLOTS

Regardless of what you planted this season or the previous year, turkeys habitually visit openings in the timber. Typically, these spots hold bugs, and if your plot features clover or another planting desirable to turkeys, all the better. Further, it's no secret that openings often serve as strutting zones for gobblers. Food plots, especially small ones, are excellent places to monitor turkey activity with trail cameras.

LOGGING ROADS AND POWER LINE RIGHT-OF-WAYS

Turkeys are suckers for thoroughfares. Unless spooked, they'll naturally travel paths of least resistance. Logging roads and power line right-of-ways are the land features turkeys probably travel most. Gobblers also strut up and

down them, hoping to attract a hen that steps out of the timber.

Where you set the camera along a logging road or right-of-way can determine how much data you capture. Yes, turkeys might travel the entire road or lane, but they'll commonly use certain stretches more than others. Walk the road or lane and check for scratch marks along both sides. Watch for puddles or mud where tracks will be obvious. Also, note any of the road's special features, such as a fork. A trail camera positioned at a fork lets you cover turkeys coming from three direc-

tions. Also, don't overlook straight stretches, especially where the road levels out with good visibility at a hilltop. I can't count how many such locations I've found that were littered with turkey sign.

RIDGES

Turkeys often roost on ridges or the side hills beneath them. Ridges provide good visibility at flydown, which lets turkeys identify danger and do a roll call after flydown before moving to a feeding area. The side hills below can provide seclusion from fierce winds for roosted turkeys.

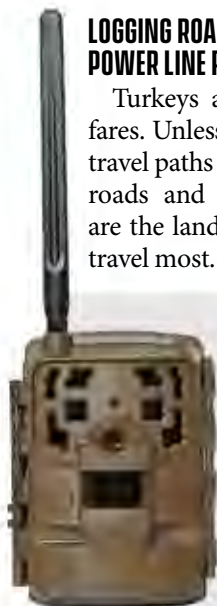
If your hunting property has ridges that feature suitable roosting trees, expect turkey activity to occur there. It's risky to hang a camera at such spots early in the morning or late in the evening. Do it at midday if you suspect turkeys are roosting there. You might listen for gobbling from a distance before going in, or go in at midday and quickly check for droppings or scratch marks in the leaves. Hang your camera where sign is most prevalent.

FEEDING AREAS

Turkey expert Brian Lovett once said, "A turkey will eat practically about anything it can fit into its mouth." Further, turkeys feed on and off all day. That means you must be on the lookout for turkey treats if you want to peg a killer trail camera location. From crickets to cornfields, turkeys feed on various items at various locations. And because they

MOULTRIE UNVEILS NEW MOBILE DELTA BASE CAMERA

The new Moultrie Mobile Delta Base cellular trail camera combines a best-in-class image sensor with a new back-end platform to deliver premium image quality and reliability. It's also easy to set up and has a price tag hunters can appreciate. Using 36 LEDs, the Base captures clear 24 MP images, day or night, and HD video with audio. It features a 0.75-second trigger speed, 80-foot detection and invisible-flash range. The Base runs on various power options, including AA alkaline and lithium batteries and solar-power accessories from Moultrie.



feed throughout the day, it's important to hang a trail camera at a feeding area or two so you can learn peak feeding times, which will help you know when to hunt that location.

A good way to determine where turkeys are feeding is to glass fields from the road or at least drive by them. If you haven't seen turkeys in likely fields, it doesn't mean they aren't using them. I've seen turkeys appear and disappear in fields in a matter of seconds. I'd suggest a midday stroll to look for droppings and other clues, such as tracks, strutting marks, scratch marks and dust bowls. If you find those, hang a trail camera so you can learn more.

Sometimes, feeding areas aren't as obvious as cornfields. If critters didn't gobble up all of the acorns that dropped the previous fall, turkeys will likely eat them before they begin to compost. Turkey sign isn't difficult to distinguish in wooded areas. If turkeys are feeding in the timber, you'll see their scratch marks and can judge the age of the sign based on whether the disrupted dirt is wet or dry.

WATER SOURCES

Turkeys get water from dew-coated green shoots, but likely not enough. That's why small ponds, creeks, rivers or lakes can be attractive to birds, especially in drier climates such as Texas or Wyoming. The smaller the water source, the easier it is to monitor with a trail camera. It's not the first location I'd pick, but if you have multiple cameras, it's a good option.

FIELD ENTRIES AND EXITS

Turkeys often enter and exit fields at common areas, such as where a logging road in the timber meets a field. Another is where understory is sparse, allowing turkeys a good view of the field — think danger or hens — before they enter it. In areas with hilly topography, it might be where a wooded ridge top meets the field, as turkeys don't often enter fields in low spots. Field entries and exits can be great places to hang cameras, so don't overlook them.

CREDIT ROLL

Although trail camera data can be incredibly helpful for turkey hunting, re-

member that trail camera images and videos are historic information, and there are no guarantees a gobbler will walk by the camera again at the same time tomorrow. Likewise, if you didn't capture a gobbler on camera yesterday, it doesn't mean today's hunt will automatically be a bust. A turkey's pea-sized brain isn't always predictable.

Bottom line: Don't use trail camera info to make poor hunting decisions. In most cases, trail camera info is very useful and can help you peg a deadly ambush location, especially if you have little time to scout before your hunt. But relying on it too much can make you miss good opportunities. A camera covering a small swatch of real estate in no way captures everything that transpires on your hunting property.

To that end, if you're ready to give trail cameras a go for turkeys, the locations I've outlined here are likely places to hang them for good results.



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