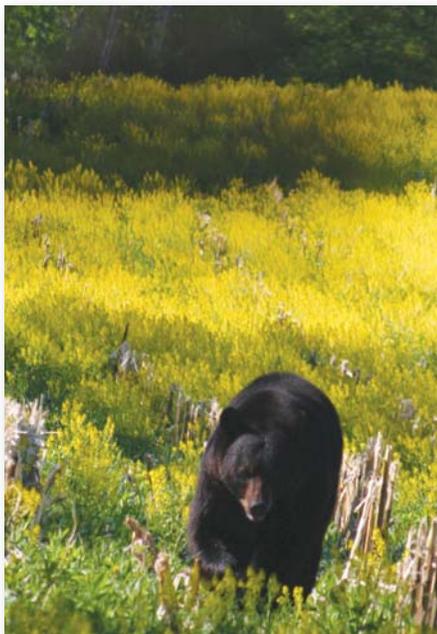


Fruitful in Barron

Successful hunt not defined by tagged turkey

By Dick Ellis



A big Wisconsin black bear pays Ellis a visit on a Barron County field of corn stubble and golden rod May 19. The bear appeared cutting across the field at 100 yards, and turned at the woodline to approach the writer's position as he hunted turkeys. Ellis stood up at about 30 yards distance and the bear left the scene in a hurry. (Ellis)

After parking in the darkness on a dirt road as directed by my landowner host the evening before, I had hugged the treeline in my journey north to evade the keen eyes of any roosting turkeys as the tilled field passed softly beneath my

boots. A promise of scorching temperatures already hung heavy in the air, and the promise of a new day hung in pinks and oranges and blues to the east.

The long, rolling field of golden rod and corn stubble sprawled ahead, far from the fading drone of the occasional passing truck on the county road behind me. This would be a place where Tom could pursue his romantic interests without interruption. I passed my shotgun and gear over the barb wire fence, struggled under, set the decoy in the field soon to be painted in yellows and greens with the rising sun, and settled in among the poplars and oak to wait the morning.

Gobbles sounded to the east and north. I waited to catch my breath a bit before quietly answering with the hen call in my mouth. An awakening hen must be emulated delicately, slowly growing in decibel and enthusiasm with the morning until eventually, she demands in no uncertain terms that Mr. Tom best come visit her now if he knows what's good for him. It's a seduction game, sometimes won and sometimes lost by the hunter, with much of the game plan decided by the time of the season.

This was season six, the last of six split five-day seasons in the 2010 Wisconsin wild turkey hunt. By design, I had purchased the tag over the counter and chosen Zone 4, a vast territory that includes much of the northwest. It was my original intention to challenge my skills as a turkey hunter by picking a large tract of public forest and employing a run-and-gun technique; walk

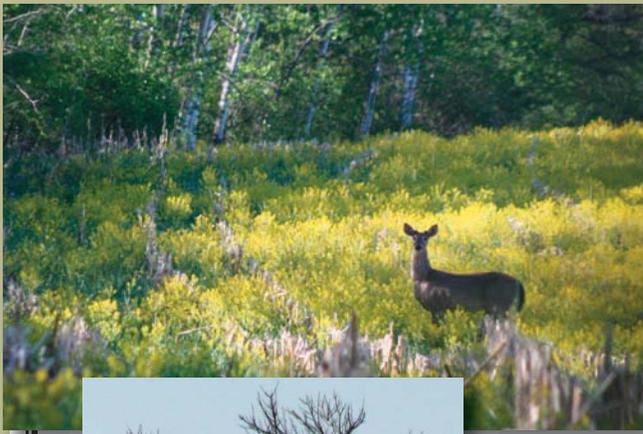
slowly with compass in hand, sweet talk Tom, wait for the gobbler, set the ambush.

The plan changed when the map showed me that Zone 4 included much of Barron County, the city of Barron and the Barron News Shield. The Wisconsin newspaper run by the father and son team of Jim and Mark Bell was founded in 1876 and has carried this syndicated column for several years. Mark is a sixth generation newspaper man with a family journalism tree that transcends the decades, or even more impressively, parts of three centuries. The family roots reach to newspapers in Ladysmith, Prentice, the Dakotas, and Barron.

"Mark," I said on the telephone, "If you can help me get on some private land to hunt turkeys I can do a story right in your backyard." "I'll get back to you," said the Associate Publisher. Ten minutes later, I had permission to hunt a 280 acre farm operated by Todd Huset. Since his grandfather first purchased the property in 1940, four generations of the family have hunted the property, historically for deer and more recently for turkeys.

I journeyed from Barron Tuesday evening with Bell to thank Huset and receive an introduction to the property. "The southern half of Barron County is a lot like southern Wisconsin with farmland and woodlots with rolling hills, said Bell. "The northern half is mostly timber and kind of like Hayward with more lakes starting too. (The city of) Barron is right in the middle."

We arrived on the Huset property to a pleasant and unexpected surprise. The landowner had contacted surrounding



ing, tractors, and a father dedicated to his land and farming. After my hunt, I would also gain insight into one man's refreshing ideas on hunting.

"I was born and raised here and have hunted the same woods my whole life," he said. "We have this farm. But if you want to find and hunt the big forest you can do that too."



(Top) This young buck was one of six deer that Ellis would see during an active day of wild turkey hunting in Zone 4 in Barron County last Wednesday. Despite temperatures in the high 80s, wildlife including bears, deer, turkeys, pheasants and grouse moved all day long.

A Barron County bald eagles nest has a curious resident when it's photographed during a season 6 wild turkey hunt.

I was more than grateful to hunt the farmlands and woodlots of the bordering properties that added up to one tremendously large hunter's paradise. From first light and first gobblers, I fell into a day-long challenge to fill the tag, and encounter after encounter with different wildlife that made the experience unsurpassed in two decades in the field.

Crowing roosters in the early morning while hunting spring turkeys in Grant County had been the primary reason Blue and I had returned to the southwest so often in the fall to hunt wild pheasants. Recent cold, wet springs have severely knocked down the bird population in Grant County, but crowing roosters in Barron this week is the exact reason I will be returning to the northwest, believe it or not, to hunt the wild bird this fall. I even saw one long-tailed rooster in search of a lady friend.

While sitting on stands in Barron and verbally working various Toms, I would meet deer on a half-dozen occasions, including a small buck, and the camera worked to capture the moments. I would talk to at least four more interested gobblers over the course of the sweltering day, and bring one wary Tom with an even more suspicious hen to within 100 yards. I sent him running in the opposite direction with one bad note on the hen call.

The day's highlight though, came at 10:00 a.m. The big black bear broke from a bordering woodlot at 100 yards and onto the field of golden rod. My camera worked to take advantage of a rare opportunity, and I prayed he would turn toward me when he hit the opposite woodline. I would grin him

down like Davey Crockett grinned the bears down in the old Disney movies, I vowed. I would bravely "count coup" on him if he ventured too close I promised, and touch him with a stick, like the Sioux Indians would do against their enemies.

He turned toward me and something like ice took the place of my blood. "Mommy," the word somehow intruded on my thoughts. Where is a fat, slower hunting partner when you need him most, I thought some more. And finally, I suddenly needed to use a bathroom. At 30 yards, I abandoned the courageous charade and stood so that he might see me, camouflage and all. He turned and ran. "You're lucky," I pointed with a new-found swagger. "You don't know how close you were to having your chubby black rear end kicked."

I would have close encounters in the dense woods several more times with vocal gobblers but I would see no more birds. When I left the woods in the evening, the final steps would send a ruffed grouse flushing to safer havens. A majestic eagle's nest with curious tenants fixed on this photographer stood just down the road. More symbolism of a wonderful day in Barron, Wisconsin.

Over a cold beer with Bell and Huset later, the landowner would find the words that best define what it really means to be a hunter. Huset had still-hunted the property during a November deer hunt with his 10-year old son. In high winds and snow, he and Brent had walked up on six does still in their beds. None of the deer had been disturbed and remained bedded.

"I asked my son, 'now wasn't that cool?'" Huset said. "He said, 'but dad, we didn't see one buck'. I told him that we had done was a lot harder than shooting a buck. Too many people think you have to kill an animal to have a successful hunt. Not me. I would have loved to see you tag a turkey. But I was so glad that you saw a bear. That was unique and unforgettable. It was a real hunt." *Wo*

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neighbors on my behalf. "I made some calls," Huset said. "You can hunt about 700 acres."

If there is a worthy match to Barron County itself, it's the Barron County people. With a cold beer on the porch of an old farmhouse porch after my property walk with tour guides Huset and Bell, I would learn a little from Huset about spring plow-



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