

OUTDOORS

Turkey fever hits for another spring

TURKEY fever hit Wisconsin in a big way the past week, starting with a two-day youth hunt and then rolling into the first of six one-week hunting seasons.

The scribbler struck out on trying to get a first-week tag in central Wisconsin and that initially bummed me out — until time showed lingering cold and snow that makes the hunt a lot less fun.

I got lucky on that one and got a preference point for next year to boot.

While I won't be chasing any turkeys with gun or crossbow until May, when I could buy bonus tags down in Zone 3, those darn northern birds got my blood pumping during the recent summer-like weather.

There's nothing like 78-degree weather in April to get those turkeys on the move, so I did some chasing even though a camera was the only steel in my hand for shooting.

For those who haven't experienced it, spring turkey hunting during the breeding season is as exciting as it is challenging.

The excitement comes in many forms, from encounters with deer sneaking past in the predawn darkness to the sounds of an awakening forest — the songs of songbirds so loud that it's deafening. Add to that the echoing prehistoric calls of sandhill cranes and noise from trumpeter swans, geese and ducks, and it's a party for the ears.

And eventually, on most mornings, the sound of spring thunder pierces the air as toms gobble from their roosts in response to yelping hens in nearby trees. And then it's game on.

If you've never had a strutting turkey slowly approach, strange drumming and thumping sounds echoing from its puffed-up body, you can't judge the greatness of this sport.

It's like watching a 10-point buck sneak through the hard-

woods in your direction.

The challenge is trying to get them in gun or bow range, and on many days, that creates some intense frustration.

It's most difficult to pull them away from live hens. It just makes sense that toms are going to stick with a sure thing — the hens yelping and purring in front of them — as opposed to something in the distance.

They'll still gobble at your calls, because it's their way of saying "Hey baby, get over here." Gobblers are

supposed to attract hens the same way that a male grouse drums on a log in spring to attract hens for breeding.

But let me tell you, these hens are competitive creatures. As hunters try to lure the toms with yelps and other hen calls, the hens turn up the volume — almost scolding the toms to stay put.

And that's not all they do. I remember a hunt where an aggressive hen would literally run down and slam into the back end of a strutting tom, surely getting his attention, and then run away in the opposite direction from my competing calls. And he chased her time after time.

Other times you finally get a tom coming on its own, with no hens in sight, and they still hold up at 70 yards and just stare down your decoys. It's hunting, not shooting, and there are no guarantees.

If you're going to chase turkeys, make sure you are in full camouflage from head to toe, including your face and hands. And if you're like me, and prefer hunting from the open woods with your back to a tree instead of from a tent, it helps to have a tree-based camo on top and a leaf-based camo on your legs.

Turkeys not only have keen eyesight, but their hearing is remarkable. They can detect the scratching of a foot on a single leaf at 50 yards. I know because I've been busted on that.



Positioned not far from a lone hen, a tom turkey struts its stuff with wings dragging, body feathers puffed and tail fanned as part of the spring breeding process. This photo was taken near Three Lakes. —Photo By The Author

Thank God turkeys can't smell like a deer or we'd have a hard time getting any of them into gun range.

Wild turkeys aren't the perfect specimen for great table fare. We are talking about a bird that can fly and fight and survive on whatever little seeds and insects it finds, so they aren't the fat, tender domestic version.

These birds aren't equipped with a normal, plump turkey breast. All they have is a solid muscle that goes from wing socket

to wing socket, with a large round bone in the middle.

I've found the best way to keep the breast meat moist and tender is to chunk it before cooking and either bread and deep-fry, or use the creamed wild bird recipe. That one is as simple as breading, lightly browning in butter and oil, and then simmering them on low in heavy whipping cream for about 25 minutes.

The other option, the best one, is to brine the filleted breast

halves and cook them slowly in a smoker. Cook it to medium and don't dry it out. It's awesome that way.

The wild turkey hunt will go through Memorial Day weekend, ending on Tuesday, May 30. There are no bonus tags available up here, in Zone 7, but there are plenty of them available in other parts of the state.

I dare you to experience this just once and not do it a second time. Turkey fever will get you.

Lead contamination prevalent in eagles, avian wildlife: DNR

BY JON EICHMAN
ASST. EDITOR

Even as society has removed lead-based products from most aspects of day-to-day life, avian wildlife in the North Woods still continue to suffer due to lead contamination.

Each year, different species of waterfowl birds and avian raptors are affected by unintentional lead consumption that is still a significant mortality factor here in Vilas, Oneida and Forest counties, according to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

Bald eagles, trumpeter swans, American woodcock, common loons, owls, ravens, vultures and other North Woods creatures unknowingly ingest lead particles dispersed throughout their habitats from the use of lead-based ammunition and fishing equipment.

A most recent victim in the North Woods that lost its life because of seven lead pellets stuck in its digestive tract, was a bald eagle taken in by Wild Instincts Rehabilitation of Rhinelander. The eagle was brought to the facility March 21, and shortly after treatment began, the bird died.

Symptoms of lead contamination within aviary species include behavioral changes, lethargy, anorexia, paralysis, vomiting, diarrhea, lack of muscle control, convulsions, anemia, starvation and the deterioration of muscle tissue.



State wildlife biologists say lead-based ammunition and fishing equipment still pose a problem for waterfowl and avian raptors such as the bald eagle, shown above. —STAFF PHOTO

Wild Instincts Co-founder Mark Naniot noted that lead is still out there and any animal released from rehabilitation has increased potential of being exposed again. He added that on average, animals with a lead exposure reading over 10 micrograms per deciliter are considered clinically toxic, and only 1% to 5% of these birds make it back to the wild.

"Timing is key when treating these animals because even one or two microscopic lead particles can cause extensive

damage to all body systems," said Naniot. "On average, birds that come in with lead contamination poisoning take around two months to be re-released back into the wild depending on the severity of each case, and some have had to stay in our care for up to eight months because of their higher levels of lead exposure."

Raptor Education Group Inc. (REGI) of Antigo, a fellow aviary rehabilitation and education center, provides a safe haven for injured and

orphaned area birds. It also develops nutritional protocol and rehabilitation methods to help create a better understanding of these animals.

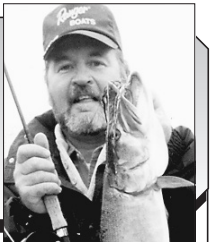
The organization brings in anywhere from 800-1,000 avian patients each year and provides different educational programs to hundreds of people throughout the North Woods.

REGI Co-founder and Director Marge Gibson, has

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Fishing with the Guides

By George Langley



Some lakes will not be open by May 6

What a miserable week it's been! Ten days until the opener and it feels like it could be mid-winter. It surely seems like our thoughts about opening day and the perch fishing that comes before it were way too optimistic.

There have been years in the past when there was some ice fishing going on over the opener, and this could be one, too. Heck, at this point even if we had a weather change and got some warm weather with sun, we still wouldn't get some of these lakes completely open by May 6, especially with highs only in the 50s and little sun predicted! Fear not, though — there will be some open water up here for the opener, especially on the Eagle River and Three Lakes chains.

There is almost no one fishing at this point — although there have been a few hardcore anglers through for bait that are unwilling to stop until they absolutely can't get out. And some who are heading South to get their boats wet. We still have 15 – 20 inches of ice on some lakes, which is certainly not what we imagined earlier in the spring when we had that bit of summer-like weather.

Despite the lingering cold and delayed ice-out, when water temperatures get high enough it will be the perch and northern pike spawning first, followed by walleyes. I seem to remember a year a long time ago when there were walleyes spawning in the stretch of open water between the ice and the shoreline, but it still depends on water temps.

Well, despite all of this moaning and griping we still do have a lot to look forward to. Sooner or later we will be able to get those boats out for some open-water fishing. It'll sure be good to get some sun also.

Let's hope for a better report next week, because we are running out of time. We've seen the weather can turn on a dime — let's hope that happens. Think positive and hang tough, anglers. Better days are coming.

Good luck and good fishin'!

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OUTDOORS



CELEBRATING EXCELLENCE

The 45th annual Headwaters Chapter Muskies Inc. banquet hosted at the Whitetail Inn in St. Germain, brought together anglers of all ages for a night of celebration, dinner and raffle prizes. Lunkers were recognized by Muskies Inc. officials for their outstanding achievements this past season.

Above: Muskies Inc. Headwaters Chapter President Bill Jacobs, stands proudly with fellow member Joe Koschnik, and Men's Lunker of the Year, Gary Zoller. Zoller caught and released this 51 3/4-inch monster on Lake St. Clair last summer.

Right: Junior Lunker of the Year Michael Schmidt smiles with his father, Patrick, while holding his 48 1/2-inch muskie mount.

—Staff Photos
By JON EICHMAN



Deer advisory council finalizes meeting dates

The 2023 County Deer Advisory Council (CDAC) meeting schedule has been finalized by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the Wisconsin Conservation Congress.

The public is encouraged to attend their local county meetings to participate in person or virtually across the state. Meetings will take place now through May 4.

Vilas County will host its meeting May 1, at 6 p.m., in the Boulder Junction town hall, located at 5392 Park St. The DNR Service Center in Rhinelander, located at 107 Sutliff Ave., will be the meeting site for Oneida County's council on May 3 and will begin at 6:30 p.m.

CDACs are made up of volunteers that represent various stakeholder groups and conservation congress members that meet annually to provide input and recommendations to the DNR on deer management within their area.

These councils review current county data on fawn to doe ratios, harvest trends, herd health, deer impacts on agriculture, forest health, economics and vehicular collisions, in addition to the deer hunter experience.

CDAC recommendations are reviewed and set annually so they can be adjusted as needed in response to the previous year's deer harvest, winter severity and other factors. Information on each county's harvest and population metrics can be found at dnr.wisconsin.gov in the Wisconsin deer metrics system section.

Following the CDAC process, the DNR will bring recommendations for the 2023 hunting season to the natural resources board for review June 21.

The public can submit questions about the process to dnrcdacwebmail@wisconsin.gov. Additionally, zoom meeting links can be found at widnr.widen.net/s/tvvqtpn8kx/statewidecdacmeetings.

Volunteer day set April 26

The Northwoods Land Trust (NWLTL) invites the public to attend a volunteer information day Wednesday, April 26, from 1 to 3 p.m. at the Tower Nibiwan Conservation Area in Sugar Camp.

NWLTL Land Conservation Associate Frank Schroyer will lead prospective volunteers through the property while discussing activities that can be done throughout the year to help monitor and maintain the trails and land.

Participants should bring work gloves, proper attire dependent on weather, bug spray, water and snacks. The group will hike for about one mile. The event will take place rain or shine, only to be canceled due to severe weather.

To get to the Nibiwan Conservation Area, take Highway 17 south of Eagle River for six miles and turn east onto Ripco Rd. From there, continue on for a half mile and turn onto Arbutus Dr., where participants



In June of 2022, the Tower Nibiwan Conservation Area property south of Eagle River, was donated to NWLTL by David and Kathy Noel. Nibiwan means "wet" in the Ojibwe language.

—Contributed Photo

can park and make their way to the conservation area entrance.

To register for the event, email Frank Schroyer at frank@northwoodslantrust.org or call the NWLTL office at 715-479-2490.

Resources board approves new regulations

The Wisconsin Natural Resources Board (NRB) has voted unanimously to approve the 2023 migratory bird season framework and regulations.

Thanks to the input from hunters and new scientific research, changes are coming to the 2023 migratory bird hunting season, according to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

Highlights include updating the definition of the open water duck zone boundary to incorporate adjacent rooted vegetation, floating cattail mats, and Green Bay's Long Tail and Little Tail points as part of the mainland shore.

Additionally, the regulations were simplified for the open water restrictions on approved inland open water hunting lakes by decreasing the distance from shore to 500 feet.

Another update included that the Mississippi River Canada Goose Zone will run concurrently with the South Canada Goose Zone, both opening Sept. 16, rather than

opening with the duck season.

"The 2023 season frameworks are based on the most current scientific data, as well as input from the public, conservation and hunting groups, and results from a waterfowl hunter survey," said DNR Game Bird Ecologist Taylor Finger. "We used everything in our toolbox to collect public input including in-person meetings, virtual meetings, and expanded online outreach to ensure engagement with anyone interested in migratory bird management. In total, we received 500 comments regarding the 2023-'25 migratory bird season proposals."

Finger added the public plays a crucial role in setting the migratory bird season structure and that the 2024 and 2025 season regulations will be coming later this year in a permanent rule.

For more information, to view public input comments, or check the full list of 2023 regulations, visit dnr.wisconsin.gov.

Early Season Dates

Early Species Season	Open	Close	Limit
Early Teal	Sept. 1	Sept. 9	6 teal/day
Early Goose	Sept. 1	Sept. 15	5 Canada geese/day; 20 light geese/day
Mourning Dove	Sept. 1	Nov. 29	15 dove/day
Woodcock	Sept. 23	Nov. 6	3 birds/day

Regular Canada Goose Season Dates And Bag Limits

Canada Goose Season	First Open	First Close	Second Open	Second Close	Third Open	Third Close
North Zone (3 Canada geese/day)	Sept. 16	Dec. 16				
South Zone (3 Canada geese/day until Dec. 3 then 5 Canada geese/day Dec. 16 - Jan. 2)	Sept. 16	Oct. 8	Oct. 14	Dec. 3	Dec. 16	Jan. 2, 2024
Mississippi Zone (3 Canada geese/day until Dec. 3 then 5 Canada geese/day Dec. 16 - Jan. 2)	Sept. 16	Oct. 8	Oct. 14	Dec. 3	Dec. 16	Jan. 2, 2024

Duck Bag Limits

Species	Total daily bag limit is 6 ducks of any species, including no more than the following:
Mallard	4 mallards, of which only 2 may be hens
Black Duck	2
Canvasback	2
Wood Duck	3
Pintail	1
Redhead	2
Merganser	5 mergansers, of which only 2 may be hooded mergansers

Duck Season Dates And Bag Limits

Opening Day Shooting Hours Will Begin One-Half Hour Before Sunrise For All Regular Waterfowl Hunting Seasons.

Duck Season	First Open	First Close	Second Open	Second Close
Youth Hunt	Sept. 16	Sept. 17		
North Zone	Sept. 23	Nov. 21		
South Zone	Sept. 30	Oct. 8	Oct. 14	Dec. 3
Open Water Zone	Oct. 14	Dec. 12		

Lead

FROM PAGE 10B

been an integral force behind making sure avian species in the North Woods are well taken care of by sharing her knowledge and expertise. The group started out as an educational field research team but quickly realized the need for a rehabilitation center in the area.

"We hold permits from both the state of Wisconsin and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife service to possess threatened and endangered indigenous species for rehabilitation and educational purposes," said Gibson. "REGI is a 501(c)(3)

nonprofit dedicated to the care and rehabilitation of injured or orphaned native bird species and public education of wildlife issues."

According to a 2008 study conducted by the DNR and Bureau of Wildlife Management, it is clear that a number of avian species of Wisconsin wildlife are still being exposed to harmful levels of lead contamination. Additionally, it is unlikely the prevalence of lead poisoning cases will decrease until the amount of lead discharged into the environment is strongly reduced.

Ammunition and equipment that contains lead leaves avian wildlife exposed to the hazards of lead poisoning by being added to hunting or fish-

ing grounds.

Since 1991, the use of lead-based ammunition while hunting waterfowl has been outlawed because of the deaths of more than two million wetland birds each year. However, lead shot and rifle bullets are still used for hunting game birds and mammals and can cover the landscape with microscopic lead pellets and particles once impact is made.

If an animal shot with this type of game lead is not retrieved or lead particles are ingested through consumption of the abandoned carcass by a scavenger, the lead contamination cycle continues on. Additionally, lead sinkers and lures still in use by anglers are also

contributors to this ongoing problem.

"It's been taken out of paint, it's been taken out of every aspect of our life. But to have it remain in a situation in where we are harvesting meat for our families to eat is something that has no logic at all," said Gibson.

She added that using copper ammunition and non-lead-based fishing equipment can not only decrease the chances of hurting these birds, it ultimately keeps families safe as well.

The 2008 DNR study deduced that in at least 25 bird species in Wisconsin, lead contamination was still a prevalent mortality factor.

Other suggested actions to

help decrease the possibility of lead contamination include using fishing equipment made from nontoxic materials, and disposing of old lead-based equipment through proper disposal methods at waste collection sites or through area recycling companies.

Additionally, spreading the word and encouraging others to switch to nonlead-based fishing tackle and ammunition is also recommended by both Wild Instincts and REGI.

For more information on lead contamination, visit dnr.wisconsin.gov.

To report possible poisoning or other animal incidents, contact Wild Instincts at 715-362-9453 or REGI at 715-623-4015.

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