

---

**Author:** Lindsay Thomas

**Date:** March 26, 2026

The first gobbler that answered my diaphragm call shocked me so badly I nearly swallowed the device! He was close! So close! But hidden in the ground cover of palmetto and sparkleberry out in front of me. I could hear his drum and spit, and even the rattle of his feathers shaken in his displaying strut.

I sat frozen, unable to even think of moving my hand to the old browning lying across my knees.

My mentor had preached to me, be still, and don't call too much. No worry! My mouth was so dry I couldn't have made a peep.

What to do? I knew he was in range. Would he step out of the cover? Should I gently raise the barrel over the edge of my camo screen?

I had taken two gobblers in the preceding springs, both called by my highly experienced mentor

and master woodsman, Jimmy Sands. Now, I was totally alone, determined to do my own calling. I had practiced, Lord had I practiced!

"Do the best you can," Jimmy would say, "Some of the worst calling you will ever hear is made by raspy old hens. The rhythm of your call is more important than the sound."



Jimmy and a small group of his friends working with Billy Lane, the son of State Representative Jones Lane of Statesboro, had been instrumental in the closing of the fall season, when hens and jakes were legal to harvest. Young birds, so anxious to rejoin a scattered flock, would come running to nothing more than the imitation of a cluck made by plucking a rubber band stretched over an empty match box. Unethical hunters, disdainfully referred to as “game hogs” could return time and again, decimating the young birds they referred to as “fryers”. A potential progeny of hundreds of poults in 4 years died with each hen.

There is no greater thrill than matching wits with an old boss gobbler, relying on

only your calling skills and knowledge of the bird and the woods. Any unfair advantage taken of him, such as hunting over bait, breaking both the law and the code of ethics, denigrates one of the most rewarding experiences in the woods and streams.

We have a spring season because of legions of law-abiding hunters. Their love of the hunt has driven the train. The law breakers are not interested in the hunt, they only want to kill a turkey and feel no obligation to the future of the sport, the game, or the example they set for the younger generations.

An old boss gobbler with a set of hooks, that confirm his stature, is a trophy to be proud of by the hunter who takes him on in fair-chase, on his ground, in the spring of the year, when his thunder rattles the woods and tells the ladies that he is the man!

I never heard another sound from that first gobbler that answered my call 40 years ago, but that experience is just as vivid in my mind as the old boss that came in 40 years later this past spring, gobbling and strutting all the way to my gun.

I have missed, and I have scored. I have left the woods having never heard a sound, but I will return to the woods in the spring, as long as I am able, in the hopes of matching wits with an old boss, even if his honor bids me nothing more than “good morning” and a “fare thee well”.