

The

TOTAL

By Lee Strawn

The days have become noticeably longer, the morning sun begins to warm your face again and with each passing morning comes a new experience. Spring is in the air. You can see, hear, smell and even taste it. The desire to get out and experience it is overwhelming. It's a new beginning and what better way to experience it to the fullest than to get outdoors.

Being outdoors in the spring means many different activities for each of us. You may enjoy bird watching and the changes that take place as a male goldfinch loses his dull winter plumage and acquires his brilliant yellow-and-black appearance. You may like to listen to the sound of a warm spring rain being drowned out by the sound of spring peepers as evening approaches. Spring could also mean walking the ridges and fields in search of shed antlers or searching the hillsides for the first patch of green that means it's time to dig ramps. Your idea of a spring experience may involve putting new line on a rod and reel and going trout fishing or catching your first smallmouth of the year. You could be looking for morels while scouting for spring turkey season. Whatever your reason, one thing is certain — being outside is what spring is all about!

Mark Shock



ramps



peeper



morel



goldfinch

Spring Hunting Experience

For some of us, it's not enough simply to be outside. In order to get the total spring hunting experience, you have to get into nature and interact with what is going on around you.

Morning gobbler hunting can be followed by an afternoon of trout fishing.

Steve Shaluta / WV Dept. of Commerce

For some of us, it's not enough simply to be outside. In order to get the total spring hunting experience, you have to get into nature and interact with what is going on around you. One of the best ways to do this is spring turkey hunting. Enough can't be said about being in the woods during the pre-dawn hour and watching the day come to life. The day doesn't seem complete unless you've listened to the birds wake up or watched a red fox slipping along looking for one last bite before heading back to the den. Being in the woods when the first gobble rolls across the ridges and spontaneously putting together a strategy to set up on the bird is only part of the total spring hunting experience.

What happens after you've tested your strategy by interacting with the tom adds to that experience. This interaction tests your skills, not just as a hunter but as a part of nature itself. Even the best laid plan can change at a moment's notice, and that's what keeps your interest. Occasionally, the gobble will come in "on a string," but more often than not your ability to

adapt and interact with nature will come into play. A hen coming up the side of the ridge and getting between you and the tom, a bird that "hangs up" at 70 yards, or the glimpse of a coyote closing in on your location will test your strategy.

The experience and lessons learned are often enough to satisfy you, but actually harvesting a gobble brings a nice close to the day's events. Regardless of the outcome, it's you interacting with nature and experiencing it to the fullest that is the ultimate reward. It's not enough to simply stand at a distance and listen to the tom as he brings in the new day. You have to get into the action to feel like you too have participated in bringing in the new day.

There is no daily ritual or experience that will make you feel more alive than being outdoors. Regardless of what activity you choose, one thing is certain, spring time is all about being outdoors.

Lee Strawn is the wildlife manager at Nathaniel Mountain, South Branch and Fort Mill Ridge WMAs.