

Patience And Perseverance Pays Off For 10-Year Old Turkey Hunter

By George R. Fischer – Idaho Department of Fish and Game

In 1777, Benjamin Franklin stated, “The answer to most of life’s solvable problems is patience and perseverance.” Bailey Cullin, age 10 of Grangeville, never studied Franklin’s theories on life, but her patience and perseverance paid off as she bagged a whopper tom wild turkey on April 10.

Bailey was chosen as one of two outstanding students from this springs hunter education course held in Grangeville. The class instructor and assisting conservation officers from the Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) nominate two exceptional students from each course and mentor them on a youth hunt of their choice. Bailey was awarded because of her motivation, good manners, outstanding grades and willingness to learn.

After deciding to pursue turkey on her first hunt, she chose her father as a hunting partner and I was to be her guide.

A week prior to the hunt, Bailey and her father borrowed a 20-gauge Remington youth model shotgun that was donated to IDFG from the National Wild Turkey Federation to help local youth and women get started in hunting. With her fathers support, Bailey became very proficient at hitting a turkey head target. Permission was obtained in advance from a generous landowner who owned several hundred acres of ideal turkey habitat near Grangeville.



Bailey Cullin, age 10 of Grangeville, proudly holds a mature tom wild turkey that she harvested on April 10, the last day of Idaho's youth turkey hunt.

But this hunt wasn’t easy. After walking several miles on opening day and hearing and seeing a few scattered birds, we all knew that harvesting an elusive tom was going to be tough. At the end of the day, we shared some great memories and learned some good lessons in firearms safety. Bailey didn’t even grumble in disappointment, as most 10-year olds would. She was all smiles and very excited to give it another shot the next day.

Early the next morning, we came close to fooling a big tom and around noon, we located another tom gobbling on a distant ridge. Bailey decided we could give it one more try, so up the ridge we went. After setting up and making a few calls, it was obvious he was coming in when suddenly, off the tom went in a different direction up the ridge.

Not willing to give up yet, Bailey wanted to give him another try. We quickly hiked around the mountain and up the ridge to get ahead of the birds. After getting set up beside a huge ponderosa pine, I yelped, clucked and cutt like a hen. Instantly a hen replied with the same calls. It seemed like only a second and a hen appeared ten yards from us. I whispered “Hen - Don’t move.”

Another hen appeared, but even closer. Our camouflage was working great, but I expected the flock would explode in flight at any second. Just then, the drumming sound of a strutting tom came from the thick brush to our right. What seemed like hours later, a red, white and blue head appeared.

I whispered to Bailey, "Safety off?" I heard the distinct "Click." I whispered, "shoot." Nothing happened. A little louder, "shoot." My heart was pounding. "Bailey shoot" I whispered again.

BOOM! Bailey got her bird – a beautiful mature gobbler weighing close to 20 pounds.

Young people today have other options to occupy their time -- video games, television, team sports and of course, the Internet. At the same time, hunting seasons are becoming more regulated and less convenient for some. However, other significant barriers to youth entering the sport could include lack of opportunity and no one to take them.

Bailey's patience and perseverance paid off, but her basic interest in hunting was the key. By mentoring our youth who are interested in hunting and sharing with them the entire hunting experience - from scouting, the getting ready, the whole experience, even cooking the game that's taken will we be able to ensure the hunting heritage continues.

Each year, IDFG offers youth hunts for turkey, waterfowl and pheasant the weekend prior to the general season opening day. Youth as young as 10 who complete a hunter education course and purchase a hunting license and appropriate permits and tags are eligible to participate. Youth hunts were created to increase youth hunting opportunities and promote hunting as a safe, enjoyable family-oriented activity.

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