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WAPPAPELLO, Mo. — With a big longbeard gobbler slowly approaching from the point of a ridge below him Saturday morning, 10-year-old Haden Barnes of Van Buren, Mo., barely could contain his excitement.

“Can I shoot now?” he repeatedly asked his father, Bobby Barnes, with the bird’s every step.

“Let him get closer” he always was told.

The turkey was taking his time, and the pressure on Haden was mounting.

“I never felt him shake so bad,” said Bobby Barnes of his son’s excitement as the gobbler approached.

With the woods so open, the gobbler stopped to look for the hen he’d been hearing calling to him, and Haden couldn’t stand it any longer.

“Don’t shoot until I tell you to,” Bobby Barnes said.

The words were no sooner out of his mouth when Haden’s 20-gauge shotgun shattered the silence in the woods.

At the shot, Haden learned the value of patience when turkey hunting.

At 37 yards, the gobbler was untouched by the shot and flew away, much to the young hunter’s dismay. He didn’t hang his head, though.

“I was disappointed,” Haden said. “He looked like he was gonna go away.”

Haden was one of nine young hunters from across Missouri taking part in an organized National Wild Turkey Federation JAKES

(Juniors Acquiring Knowledge, Ethics and Sportsmanship) turkey hunt, known as the Spring Hunter Apprentice School, at Wappapello Lake during Missouri’s two-day youth turkey season.

The hunt, according to coordinator Rob Stover, is a joint effort of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers at Wappapello Lake, the NWTF’s George Clark state chapter and the Missouri Department of Conservation.

Over the course of the weekend, the nine participating hunters and their families stayed at the SEMO Youth Camp and enjoyed food, fun and several presentations.

Guides for the annual youth hunt, Stover said, are volunteers, who only want to see the youngsters enjoy their hunts. Most of the guides, he said, are park rangers at Wappapello.

“They’re awesome,” Stover said of the guides. “I could not do it without the Corps guys.”

Park Ranger Tyler Stahl, who guided Haden on his hunt, said this camp “is one of the highlights of my year. I really enjoy it.”

For Stahl, the best part of the youth hunt is getting extra time in the woods and “introducing kids to turkey hunting.”

The concept behind the event, it’s fifth consecutive at Wappapello Lake, is to “give young hunters, who otherwise wouldn’t get such an opportunity, a chance to hunt turkeys,” Stover said. “We want it to be a positive experience for them.”

Everyone, of course, wants to kill a turkey during the camp,

Stover said, but that’s not really what the youth hunt is all about.

“It’s all about the hunt ... just being out there, hearing birds and working them,” Stover said. “We’re hoping to put some basic knowledge and turkey hunting savvy into the kids, and the killing is secondary. You don’t have to kill a bird to enjoy the hunt.”

Young hunters, like the ones in this camp, Stover said, are “the future of our sport, and we want them to have this experience at an early age.”

In fact, Stover said, giving young hunters good outdoors experiences is the whole concept behind the NWTF’s JAKES program.

“If we don’t get the kids involved,” Stover noted, “it’s going to die off.”

At the conclusion of the event Sunday, Stover said, everyone “got to hear birds gobbling and some got to work birds.”

The biggest thing, Stover noted, was “they all told me they had fun.”

Plans already are in the works to return to Wappapello Lake for next year’s JAKES hunt.

“It’s a great place,” Stover said.

As for Haden? He redeemed himself early Sunday morning when he took a 19.5-pound gobbler at a much more manageable 17 yards.

It was the only bird taken by the hunters in camp.

“We set out a hen and jake decoy, made a few soft calls and scratched in the leaves, and he came right in,” recalled Stahl.

“It was awesome,” Haden said. “We were going to a

different one, and this one was gobbling so we went to it. It took him about three or four minutes to come in.”