

*"We're not in Michigan anymore, Toto," I thought as I pulled cactus spines out of my hand. Ironically, a little piece of home was exactly what I needed to turn this Texas turkey hunt into the most memorable of my life.*

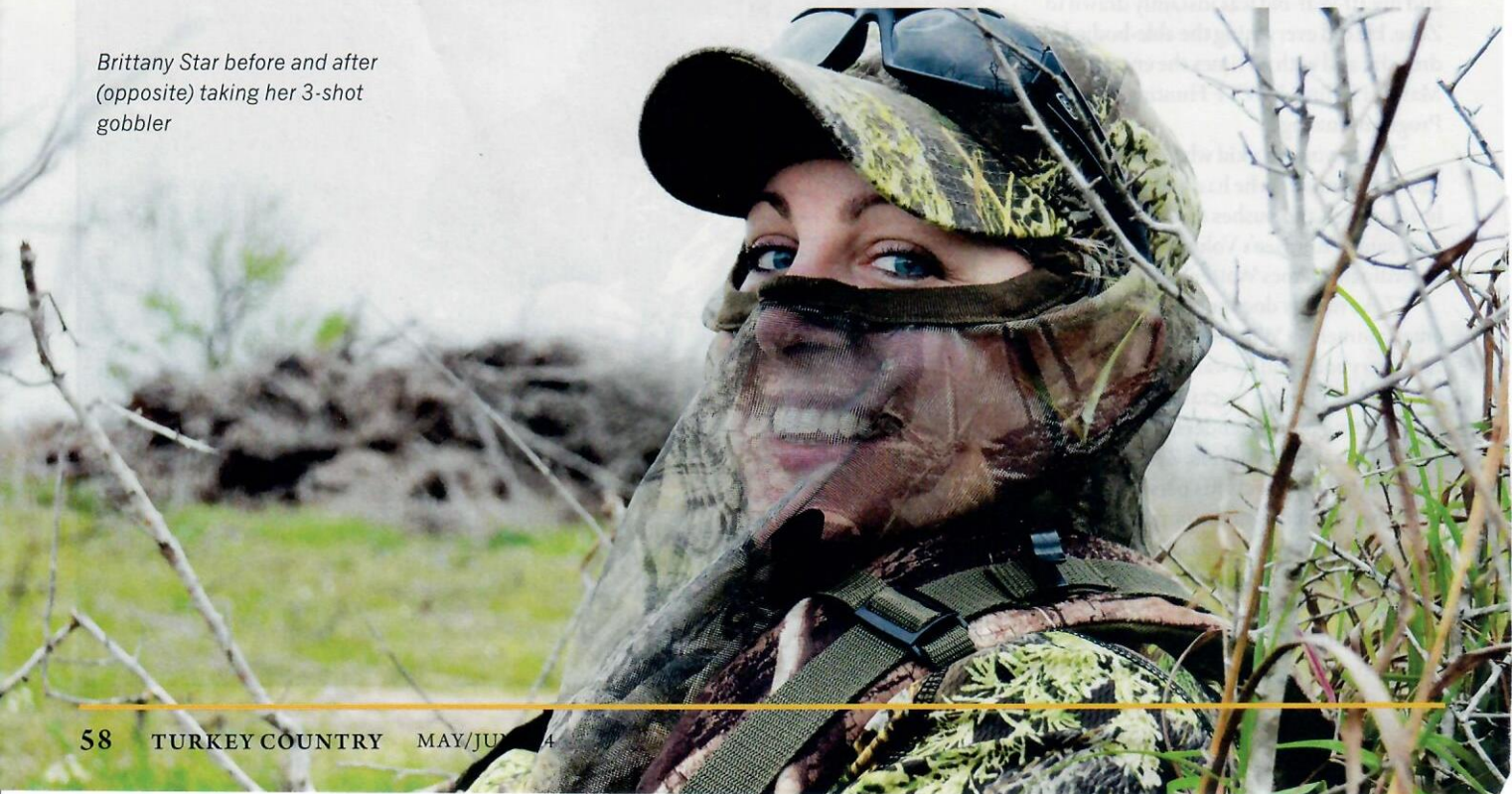
# THE 3-SHOT GOBBLER

story and photos by Brittany Star

**Last spring,** I participated in a turkey hunt hosted by Benelli USA for a group of outdoor writers. We spent the majority of a week at Sarco Creek Ranch in Goliad, Texas. Everyone easily patterned his or her Franchi Affinity 20-gauge shotgun with Federal Premium No. 6, 3-inch Heavyweight Turkey Loads, except for me, because my gun was set up for a right-handed shooter.

Being a southpaw has its perils. As daylight expired, Benelli USA channel manager Jens Krogh shimmed the gun's stock with a few pieces of cardboard, a necessary fix as the Affinity shim kits were lost in transit. We used the headlights of a Polaris ATV to provide just enough light so I could put one last shot on paper — high and to the right. Given how quickly night was advancing, we decided I

Brittany Star before and after  
(opposite) taking her 3-shot  
gobbler





would just have to hold low and left if I took a shot at a gobbler. I went to bed that night questioning what I had gotten myself into.

## Stuck

The next morning found me sitting one tree away from world-renowned hunter and Benelli USA Brand Marketing Manager Joe Coogan, toting a gun I wasn't confident shooting while trying to call turkeys in an unfamiliar place.

"Great," I thought, "I really hope I don't embarrass myself." Luckily, during breakfast, Joe and I established a plan that I would do the calling (something I was comfortable with) until the birds were just outside of shooting range, and then he would take over from there.

I glanced to my right to find Joe typing feverishly on his phone. To my left sat the Affinity and my turkey calls and out in front, a single hen decoy, perfectly positioned for on-coming suitors. All seemed well in the hunting world as I pulled on my face mask and reached for my gun.

Instead of cold barrel, I felt cacti barbs.

A string of expletives ran through my mind as I began to dig the shards out of my palm. Despite the pain, I retrieved my Woodhaven "The Vision" pot call, made it sing and heard a response off in the distance. My heartbeat quickened. I yelped and cut — more gobblers. I realized there were two toms, and I had their attention. The only party whose attention I didn't hold was my partner. I looked over at Joe. He was still on his phone.

I sat quietly, waiting for the birds to make their next move. The gobblers' plans were clear: find the talkative hen. They were approaching from the right, roughly 150 yards away. I kept yelping and cutting. Joe kept typing.

As I played a game of back-and-forth with the toms, I quickly became aware that they had at least one hen tagging along with them. The first of the gobblers came into view, heralded by the glistening of his feathers. One-by-one, the group of two longbeards and three hens appeared. As soon as the longbeards caught sight of the decoy, they gobbled in unison, spreading their fans and puffing their feathers in hopes of enticing the new girl. This was the first time I had seen a Rio Grande wild turkey in person and they were more beautiful than I expected. The group continued moving from the right to the left, making a wide loop behind the decoy. Suddenly, along with my heart, the group stopped approximately 50 yards behind the decoy.

I gave one last string of soft yelps on my call. The turkeys were still out of range but I knew I had them hooked. I set down my call and slowly shouldered the Affinity, knowing I would have to rely on Joe from this point. I tried to look out of the corner of my eye to see



Benelli USA Brand Marketing Manager Joe Coogan (left) and the author pose with her three-shot gobbler.

what he was doing, but I couldn't catch him in my peripheral vision. Afraid to move my head, I had to simply trust he would follow through with our plan.

The group made its way a few steps closer to the decoy and stopped to examine the decoy. Their verdict was written all over their beady eyes. They didn't like her.

## Silence and swings

All I could hear was the wild beating of my own heart. "Just breathe," I thought.

"Come on, Joe. Do something," I silently coached, as the toms continued to stare. Seconds passed, but they seemed like hours. "DO SOMETHING, JOE!" I willed.

Finally, I heard Joe scratch a yelp on his slate call, and the toms both let out thunderous gobbles. They displayed and approached the decoy, both jockeying for position within shooting range.

"Don't mess this up," I told myself. "Breathe and squeeze the trigger."

The two longbeards stopped dancing long enough for me to put the fiber optic sight on one of their necks. I flicked the safety off and squeezed the trigger. Time stood still as the shot missed entirely, causing mass turkey chaos.

"Shoot again!" Joe yelled.

## Success

I swung the shotgun, following the running gobbler and squeezed off another shot. Another miss. I could see the gobbler's head and neck stretch out as he started to fly relatively low to the ground. Suddenly, I was transported to a place where cacti don't grow — back to Michigan's North Woods. I lead the gobbler like I was shooting a ruffed grouse on the wing. Instinctively, I fired my last shot. The longbeard's wings folded and he tumbled to the ground.

Astonished, I engaged the Affinity's safety, set it on the ground beside me, scrambled to my feet and, after a quick celebration, joined Joe in walking to the bird. It didn't feel real. A mix of relief, excitement and thankfulness overwhelmed me to the point that I could barely breathe. A few tears fell from the corners of my eyes. In my 15 years of turkey hunting, I don't think I've ever been as excited about a turkey as I was about that Rio Grande. I kneeled next to my bird and examined his feathers, spurs and 9½-inch beard.

"Why did you wait so long to start calling?" I later asked Joe.

"I was typing out a really important email on my phone," he replied, laughing, "and my call was buried in my vest pocket."

Even if Joe had been able to keep his eyes off his phone, I still would have had to rely on my bag of Michigan-born tricks and cacti-scarred fingers to make this hunt happen. Luckily for the sake of my pride, and this story, it did. 🦃

## Franchi Affinity semi-automatic shotgun

This lightweight semi-auto shotgun features Franchi's Inertia Driven system.

**Gauge:** 12- and 20-gauge

**Barrel length:** 26- or 28-inch (12-gauge) and 26-inch (20-gauge)

**Chokes:** Improved cylinder, modified and full

**Finish:** Black synthetic, Realtree Max-4 and Realtree APG

**Weight 12-gauge:** 6.4 pounds, 20-gauge: 5.6 pounds

**Length of pull:** 14.25 inches

**MSRP:** \$849 to \$949





